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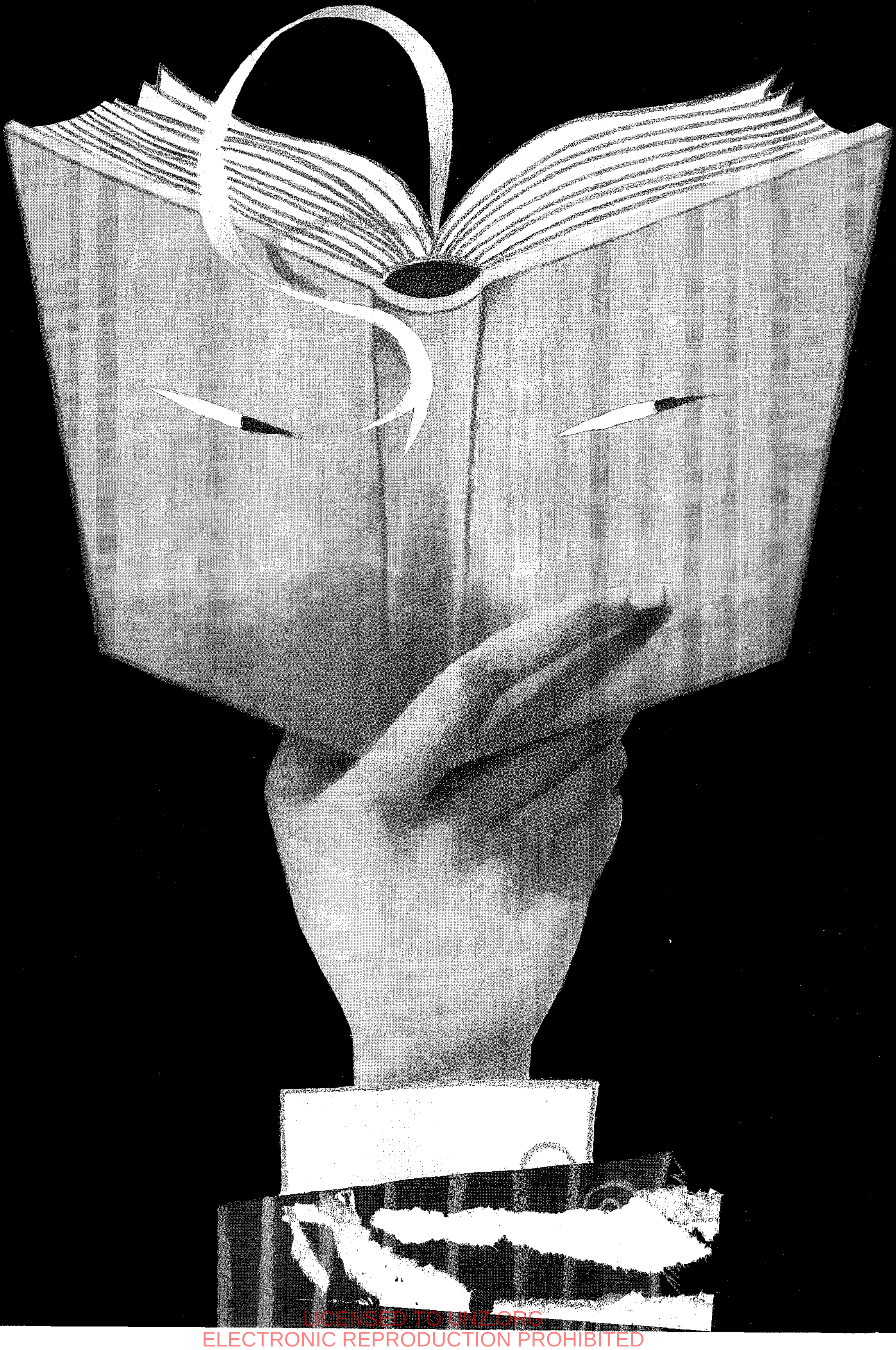

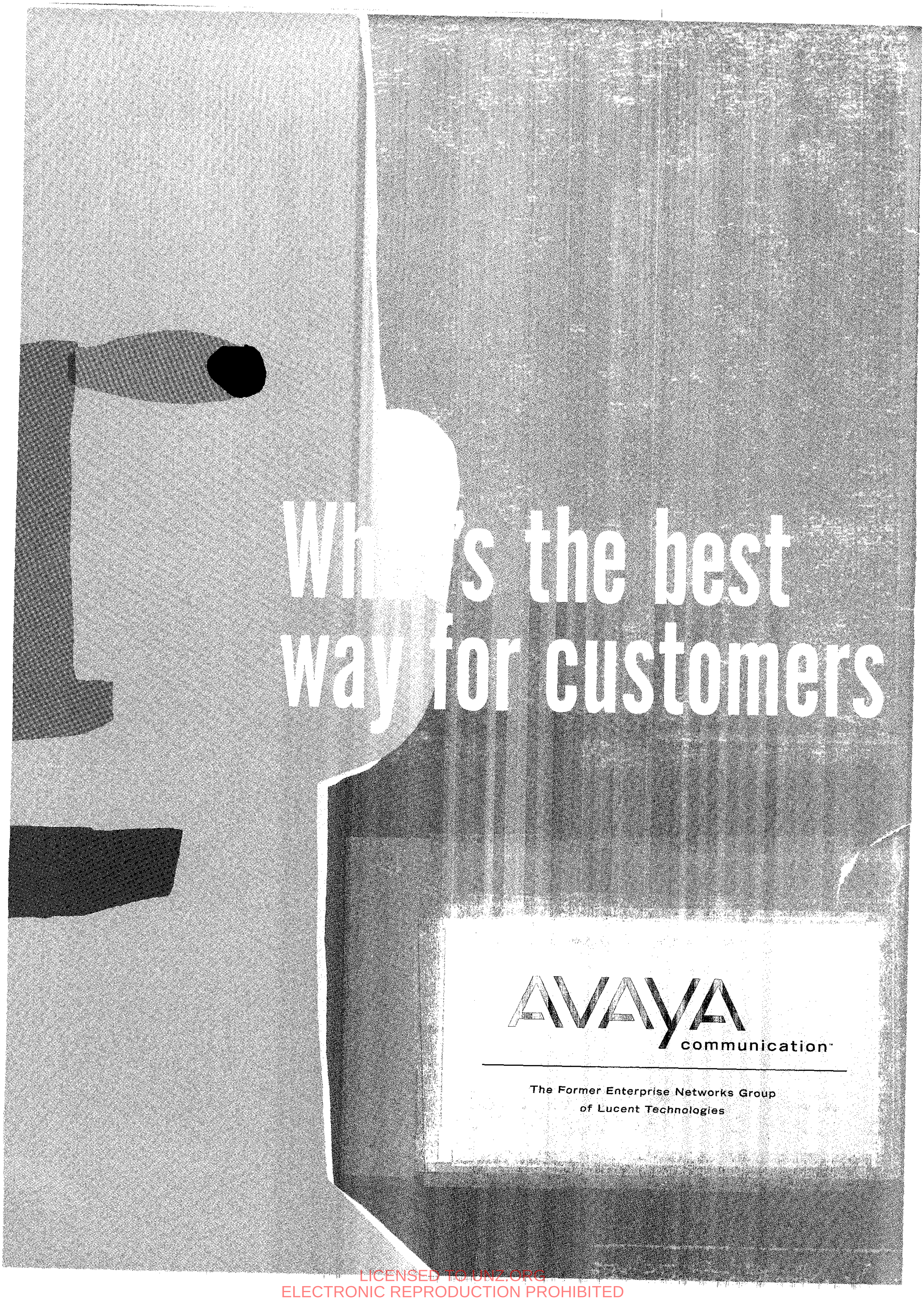
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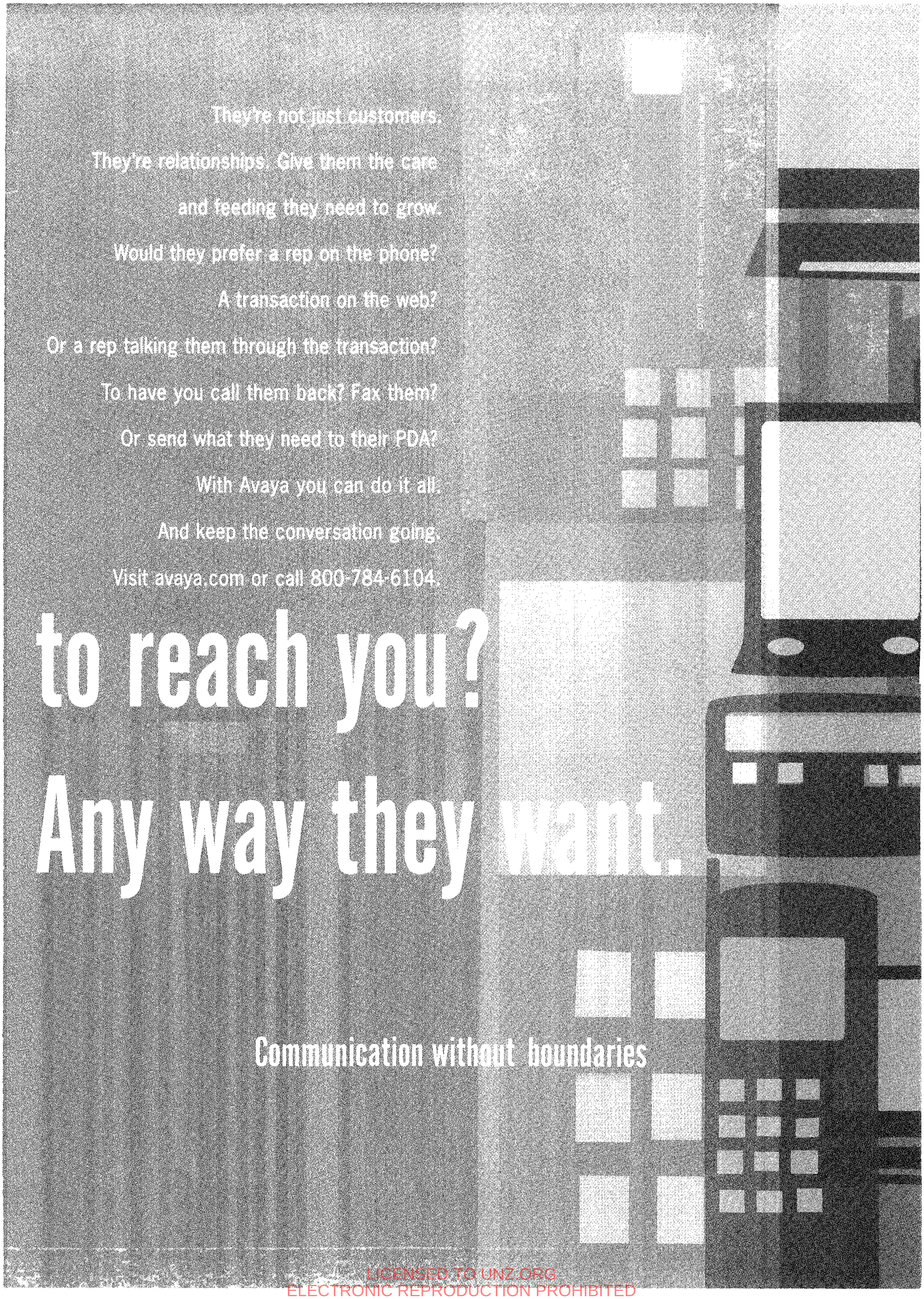

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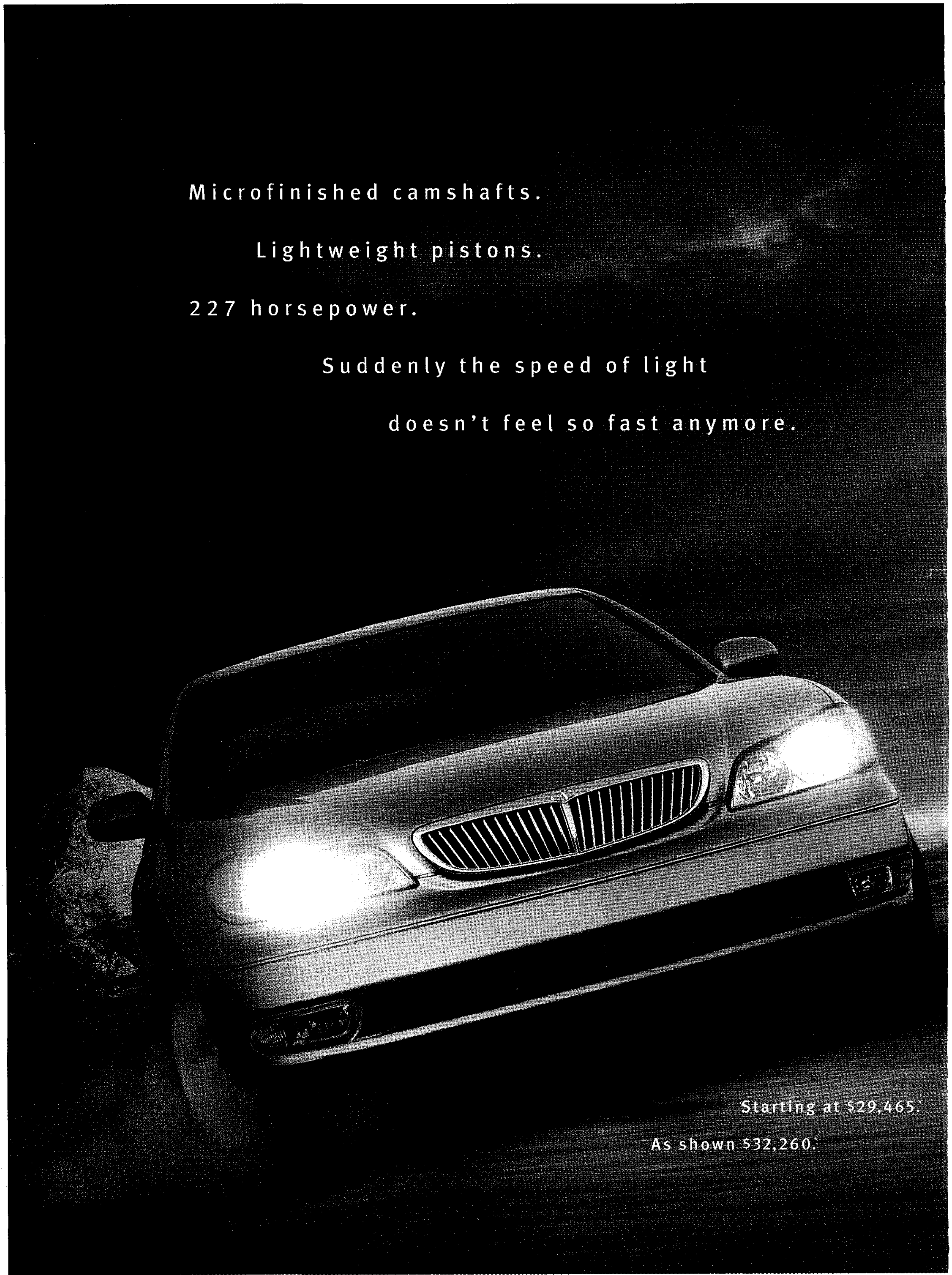
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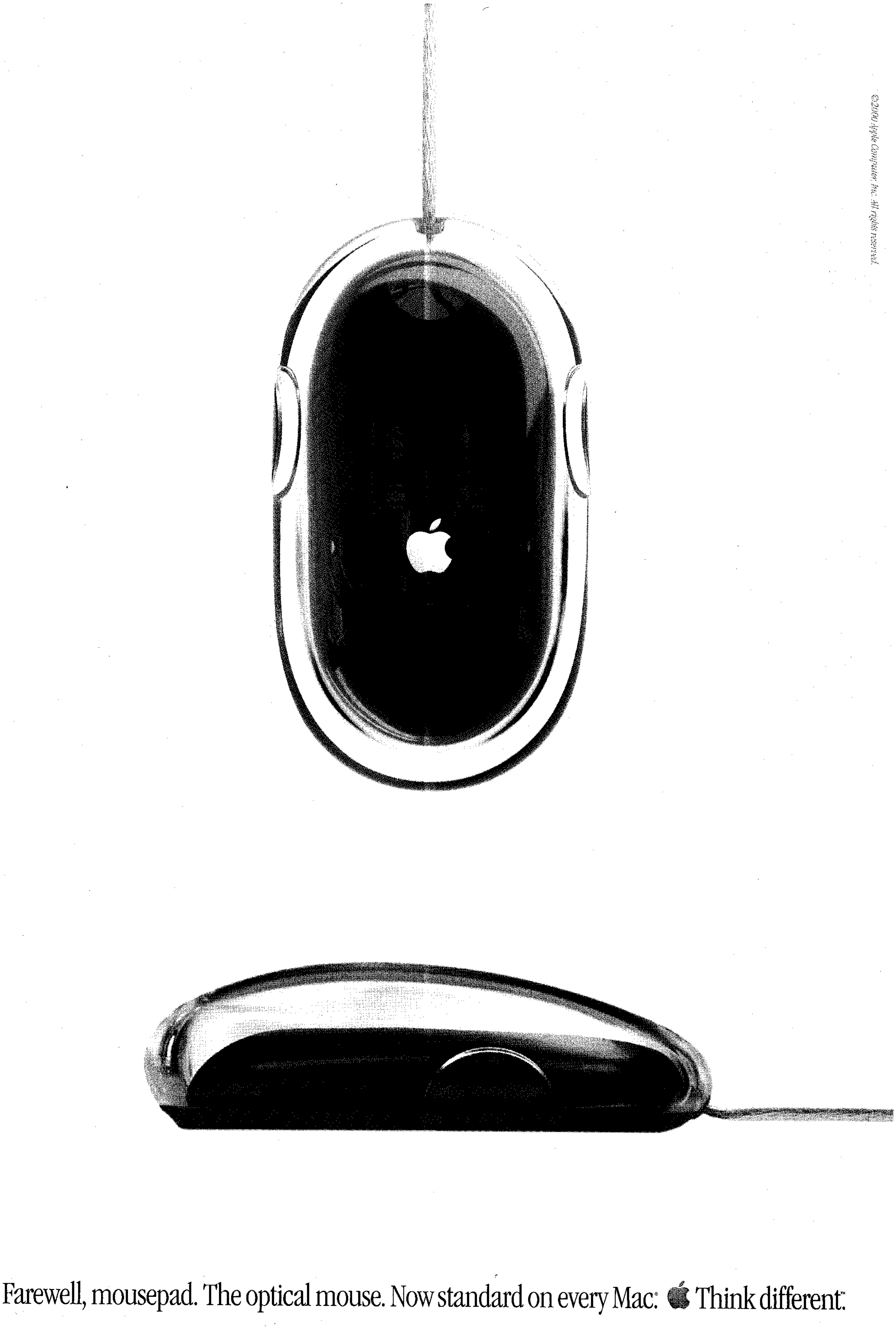
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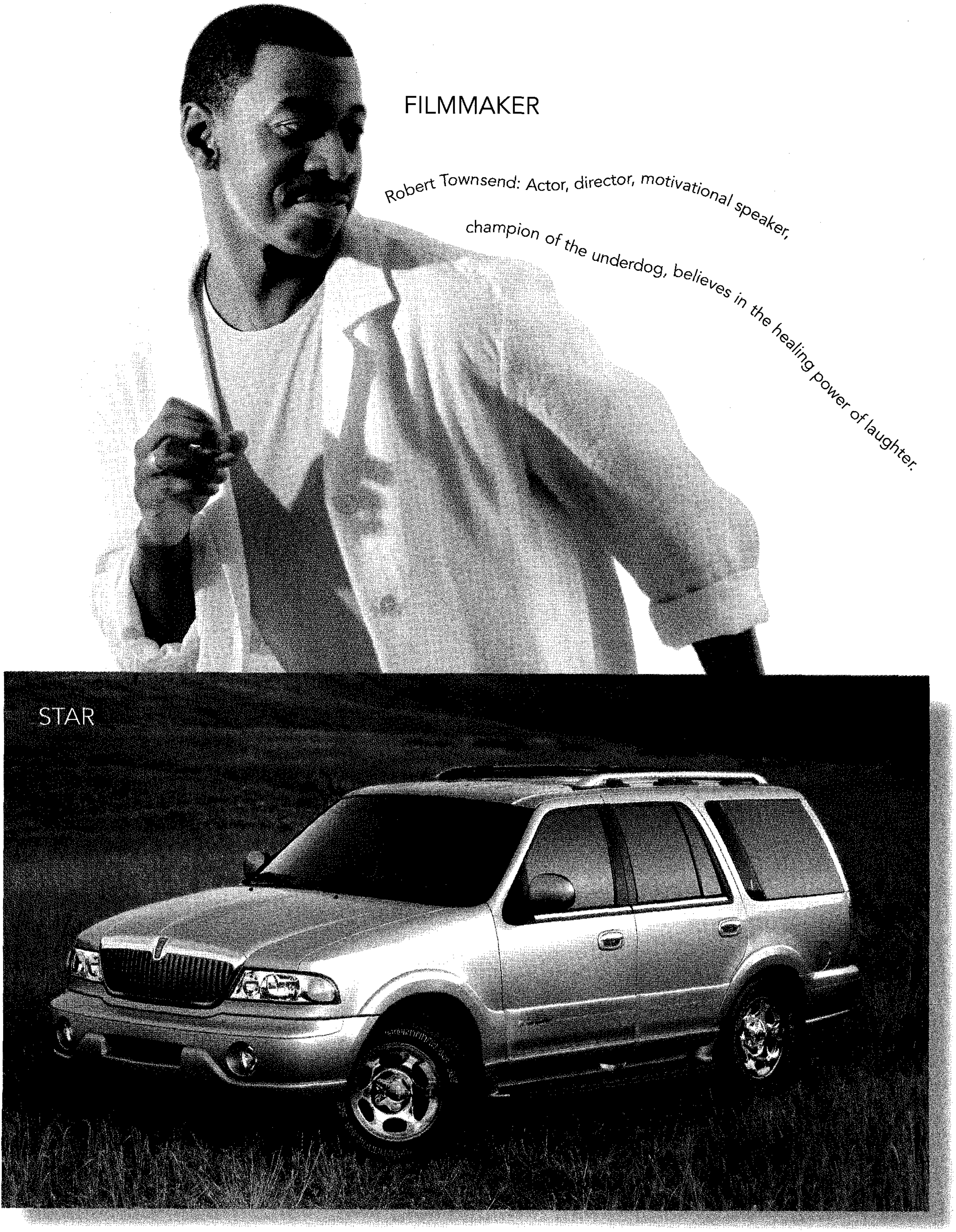
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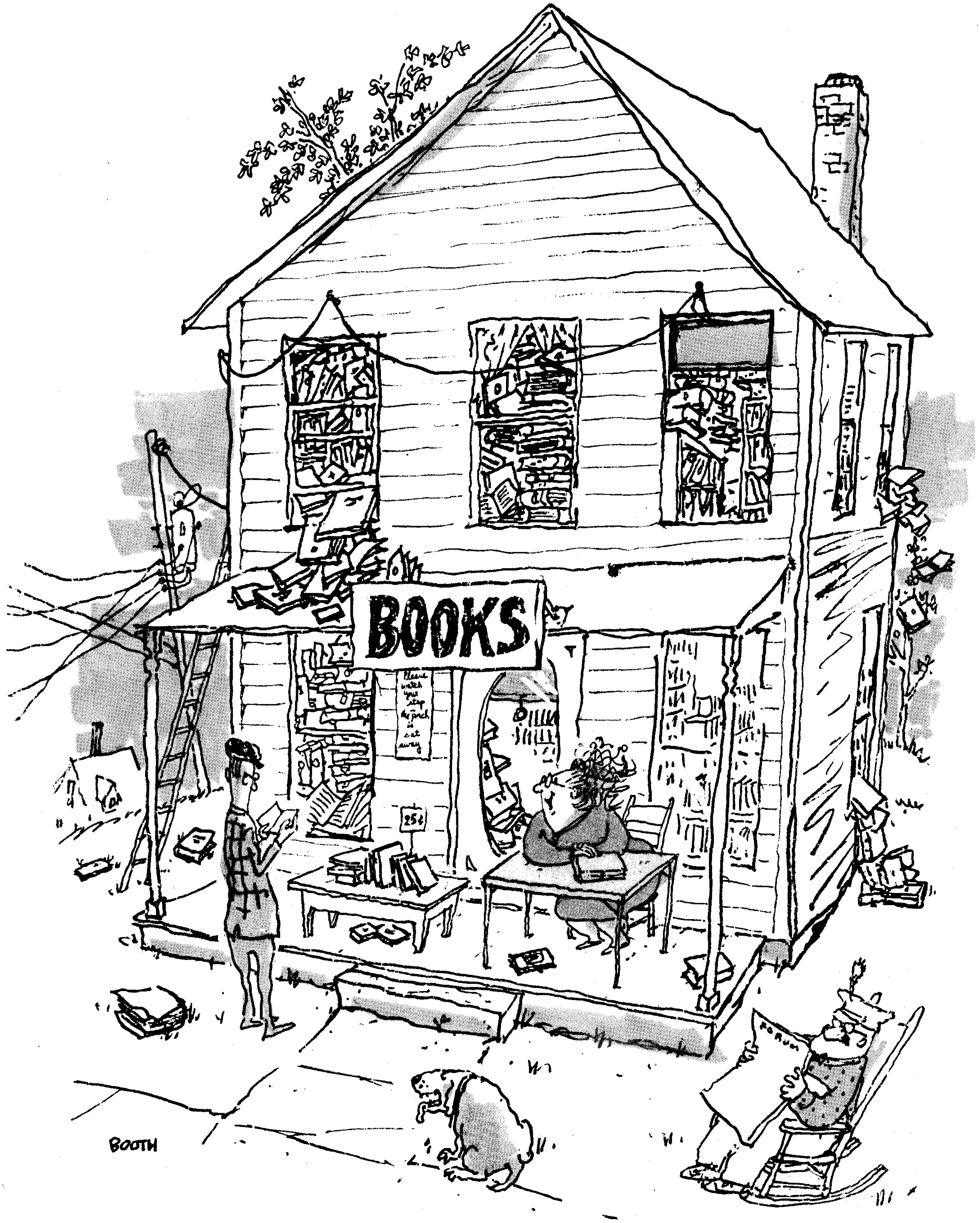
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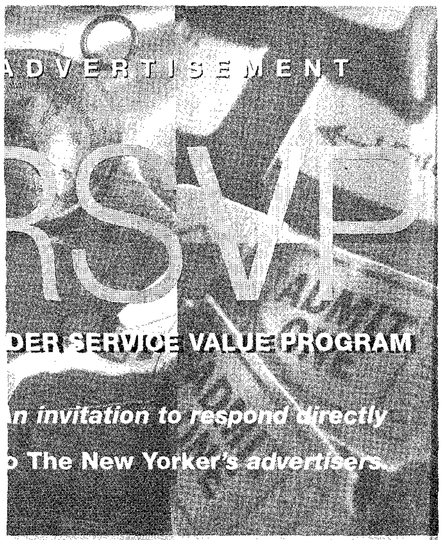
on his shins—it's just part of the job.

As you may have gathered, this is an amoral piece of work. Yet the disapproval that Senator Lieberman has expressed of this sort of expertly nasty Hollywood entertainment should not, I think, cause any of us to disavow the pleasure that we may take from it. Nihilism put forth with gusto and wit has always been among the chief pleasures of crime movies; anyone who denies the truth of this is just not to be trusted. What you get from a movie like "The Way of the Gun" is not a morally coherent world but an elaborate kind of joking. The two heroes speak to each other in a peculiar tough-sensitive jargon, and Ryan Phillippe delivers a voice-over narration in which he announces that he and his partner may be lowlifes but they will die in their own way, and in their own time, and not after working forty years at the 7-Eleven—or words to that effect. Phillippe's character would have been quite at home in the noirish forties, when bravado was often served up with a highly literary garnish and delivered, ripely into our ears, by heroes who could talk.

In "The Way of the Gun," the fancy-Dan rhetoric plays off the hard, flat walls and the opaque, shadowless surfaces of the Southwest. The movie is radically ornate and radically simple at the same time. There is a strange, stop-and-go auto chase down narrow alleys in which the boys want to move so slowly, before a sudden acceleration, that they open the doors and walk their feet on the ground outside the car. McQuarrie is an eccentric—a thinking man's brutalist. He induces Ryan Phillippe to shed his pretty-boy, junior-Brad Pitt image, though he's less successful with Benicio del Toro, who is so soft-voiced and shadow-eyed that he seems drowsed in a permanent hangover. (Del Toro may well be a good actor, but we would have to *hear* him to be sure.) Among the movie's delights is James Caan's performance as a shrewd old boy who has learned to survive by laying back. Caan, at sixty, is like a soft-shoe dancer: he never strains for effect. A friend, shot in the belly, asks if he can die alone, and Caan, with the slightest smile, recognizing that manners always count, silently withdraws. "The Way of the Gun" may feel ludicrous at times, but it also has moments of what one can only call grace. ♦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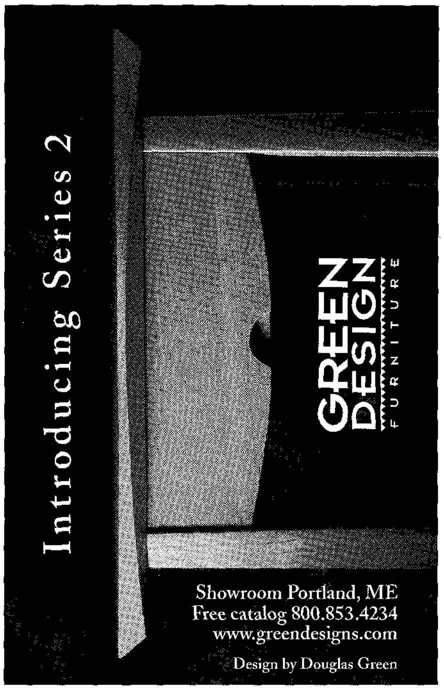
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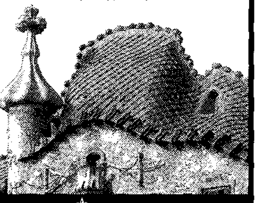
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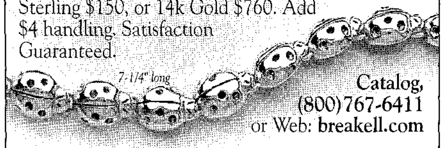
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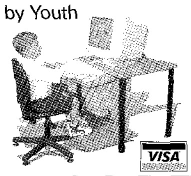
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ter. It's quieter (there's very little music), much more matter-of-fact. Karyn Kusama blocks out everything cleanly; she makes one point at a time, but only one point—the atmosphere doesn't sing. The poetry and fluency will come, one hopes, with the next Kusama feature, but at least the director has the instinct, in this movie, to take the camera to the face of her young star whenever she can. Michelle Rodriguez, who is of Puerto Rican and Dominican descent, and lived in Texas as a child, turned up in an open casting call. She hasn't done much acting before—she's untrained, a little obvious—but she moved me, because she gives a lot of herself. The entire dramatic interest of the movie lies in the moment-by-moment expression of pride and desire as it plays across her features. Rodriguez looks vicious wearing a boxer's mouth protector, which pulls her lips down even farther, but when her face softens and the dark anger changes into longing she can be as beautiful as a legendary star from fifty years ago. There's a flicker of irony in her disdain which could develop into a real comic style. The only thing that threatens her talent is the temptation of righteousness, the need to win all the time.

Diana falls in love with a handsome young boxer (Santiago Douglas) who also trains at the gym, and the movie turns into a feminist fairy tale—this beautiful young man is in awe of Diana's integrity, and in awe of her right hook, too. It was a stupid mistake, I think, to twist the plot elements around so that the lovers are forced to fight in the ring, and even stupider to make it all come out right—in truth, they would both be emotionally wrecked by that encounter. The filmmakers took hold of a tremendous theme—this girl can create herself only by releasing her anger, but that anger threatens to destroy everything she loves—and then they copped out on it. "Girlfight" is too much a fantasy, a dream of every wish fulfilled. But Michelle Rodriguez, with Kusama's help, has established a new type of screen character, and she'll go a long way with it if she gets the chance.

Those who like their thrillers cruel, literate, and visually elegant should not miss the kidnapping-for-ransom movie "The Way of the Gun." The picture was written and directed by Christopher McQuarrie, who earlier concocted the acidulous screenplay of "The Usual Suspects," a crime movie that instantly achieved cult status—at least in my house, where the teen-age boys recite lines from it by heart. "Suspects" was intricate and profane and snarlingly funny. "The Way of the Gun," by contrast, is morosely philosophical and sinister. Two good-looking young thugs, played by Benicio del Toro and Ryan Phillippe, abduct a young woman (Juliette Lewis), who is carrying, for a good fee, the child of a wealthy and respectable-looking gangster. The boys head for Mexico with the pregnant woman in tow and various operatives employed by the gangster in pursuit. "The Way of the Gun" doesn't make much sense, and it's not really supposed to—McQuarrie's screenplays are pregnant with their own mysteries, and what they give birth to are not serious answers but still more teasing mysteries. (Keyser Soze lives, I guess.) But the nonsensical plot is pushed along by McQuarrie's specialty—a crackling energy of loathing and contempt. This is the kind of movie in which people talk to other people by first slamming them against a wall. That tends to get their attention. There are many gunpoint confrontations and much violence, and poor Juliette Lewis, hauled around like a football, finally gives birth to her baby, by means of a C-section, in a highly insalubrious Mexican brothel. "The Way of the Gun" will not make women comfortable; indeed, the few women who see the picture may well wish that all the men in it would die in the final shoot-out. Not that the men would mind much: in this film, they take bullets the way Mike Piazza takes foul balls

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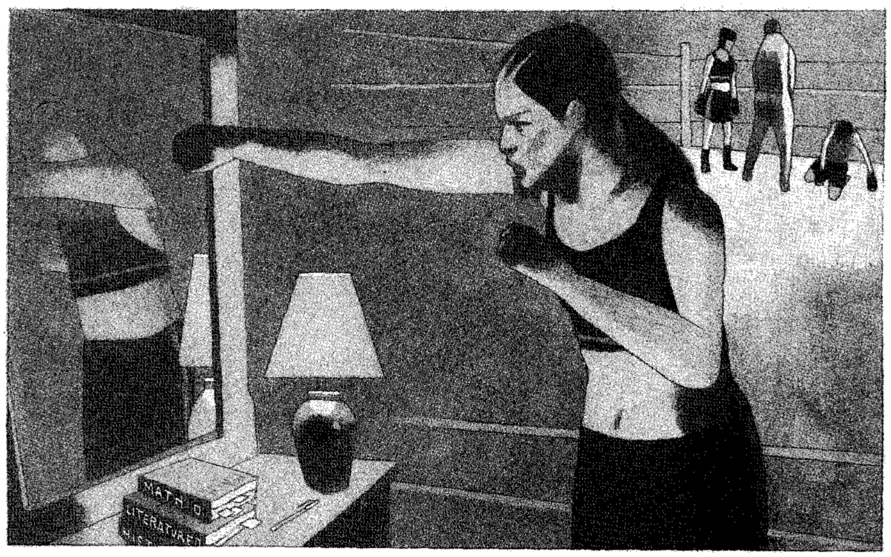
THE CURRENT CINEMA

ROUGH STUFF

A girl who hits, and well-spoken sociopaths.

BY DAVID DENBY

Michelle Rodriguez, the new, unproven star of "Girlfight," is magnificently sullen. When we first see her, she's standing with her back to a locker at her Brooklyn high school. Kids pass back and forth in front of her, but she doesn't see them—they don't really exist for her. Rodriguez's head is tilted down, and her mouth turns down, too, and when she looks up, slowly, very slowly, the pupils of her eyes fix the camera in a malevolent stare, and I thought, This girl has a face I want to look at. A small independent movie written and directed by Karyn Kusama, "Girlfight" is all about a young woman's anger. Diana Guzman (Rodriguez) lives in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, in the projects, with a hapless, preening father (Paul Calderon) and a younger brother (Ray Santiago) who hasn't found himself yet. Angry people, at their worst, waste time dramatizing themselves and antagonizing everyone else, but "Girlfight" suggests that outsiders don't have the luxury of suppressing their rage. At school, Diana gets into fights; she whams some silly girl who insults a friend of hers, and she does it without remorse. The movie provokes and engages us by making it clear that Diana's violence explodes as a result of perception and intelligence. If she doesn't hit people, she's going to go dead inside.



Michelle Rodriguez in "Girlfight," a film about a young woman's anger.

HERVE BLONDON

Diana wanders into a shabby Brooklyn gym where her brother boxes, and at once she's at home in a way that she can't be in the projects. The club is run by men so old they could be crustaceans living in some dark underwater grotto, and they look at her with bland detachment. She's a girl, and girls are not supposed to fight, but who knows? She may have some talent. With their muttered asides, the briny wisdom of fifty years of nowhere club fights, the men treat her with rough impersonality, which is exactly what she wants; she links up with a trainer (Jaime Tirelli), one of the younger men there, who spars with her and becomes, by degrees, a real father, a man whose discipline she can accept.

"Girlfight" is an attempt at feminist populism. The movie doesn't have the drive of "Saturday Night Fever" or the first "Rocky" movie or any of the populist classics in which outsiders fight, dance, and shove their way into the cen-

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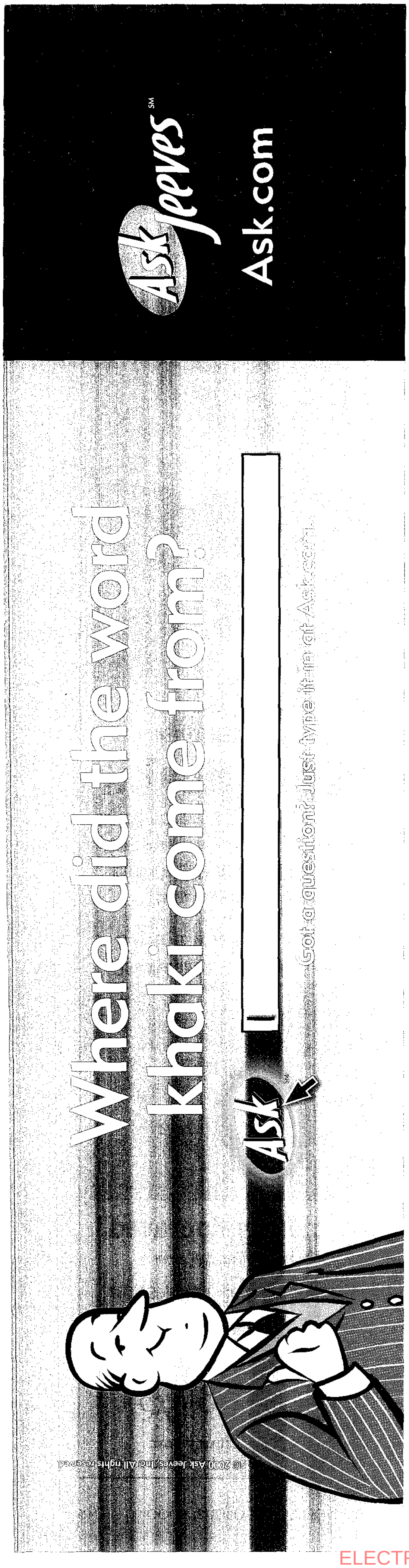
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lemical work on hand is unpersuasive—not that it is meant to persuade. It is meant to give a pre-formed "us" a "them" to despise. This intention proves to be strikingly iffy in matters pertaining to DNA, which, after all, makes an "us" of everybody, including plankton and asparagus.

The uncanniness of the new bioscience is a boon to practitioners of *l'humour noir*, who play it for wondering, shivery laughs. Bradley Rubenstein shares with us some undetectably manipulated photographs of adorable little kids who have something strange about them: they look out at us with dog's eyes. Surrealism is back, this time not as a revolt against reason but as a brand of explanatory illustration and playful extrapolation. Simply to think along some current scientific lines is to beget monsters, to the point where any monstrosity may assume an air of science. This show includes tomatoes that, having been forced to grow into molds, become daffy cartoon heads. There is an exquisite-corpse video game. I don't know how to characterize a vast photograph, by Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, of two women sunning on a rocky beach. The picture's medium is a kind of grass that stays green after it dies. I'm reminded of a remark attributed to a legendary jazzman: "Everybody around here's doin' somethin'."

Eduardo Kac may translate his beleaguered Frankengene back into English at the end of "Paradise Now." He has done this before. After a Kac show last year in Austria, the Biblical sentence came out only slightly rumpled: "Let aan have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that ioves ua eon the earth." Of course, we know that subtle anomalies in a strand of DNA can make the difference between, say, a Nobel laureate and a mime. But pardon me for noting something obvious: the changes in the verse are not improvements. Nor do they affect its meaning, which persists in a manner that is independent of biology. Meaning may arise from ultimately explicable chemical and electrical events in the brain, but it then takes wing—across thousands of years, in this case, directly from somebody else's mind to ours. The beauty of the sentence clinches its argument. A creature that can think and sing like that is irretrievably stuck with a fateful edge over other species. ◆

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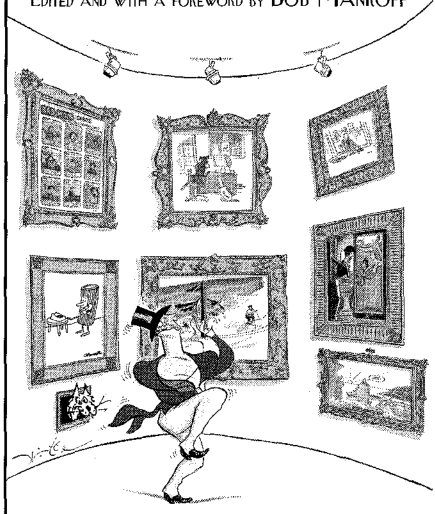

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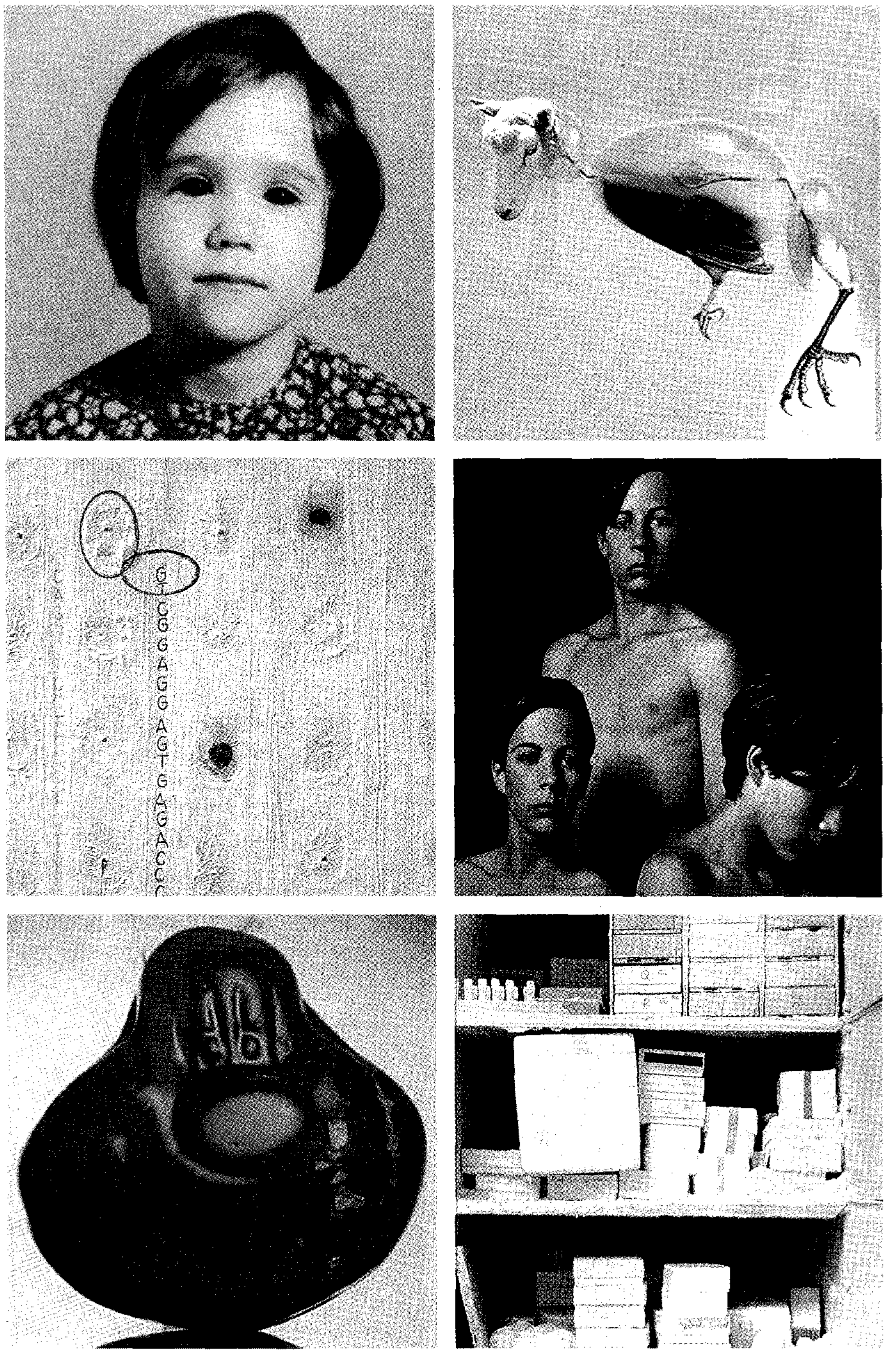

Art gets genetic (clockwise from top left): Rubenstein's "Untitled (Girl with the Puppy-Dog Eyes)"; Sutton's "Hybrids"; Cottingham's "Fictitious Portraits"; Wagner's "-86 Degree Freezers"; Stein's "Smile Tomato"; and Lackey's "Smear (3)."

COURTESY EXIT ART

tinction enough. There's something discouraging about this, perhaps. Art used to crown civilization. Now it skitters through seams and around corners, eagerly parasitic.

"Paradise Now" displays other living things besides Kac's edited bacteria. Brandon Ballengée invites us to observe his selective breeding, in transparent water tanks, of a tiny, dainty, possibly endangered African species of frog. He says that he aims to literally breed "backwards," recapturing the traits of former generations. Those are cute frogs. Nearby, Natalie Jeremijenko's "OneTree" presents several growing clones of a Paradox tree (a cross between two varieties of walnut). Clones are spooky. Beyond biota, what thrives at Exit Art is texts. This is the kind of show where your experience of a work hangs fire until you finish reading the label. Thinking back later, you may decide that reading the label *was* your experience. This is certainly the case with a few artists who protest corporate uses of biotechnology. As usual, the po-

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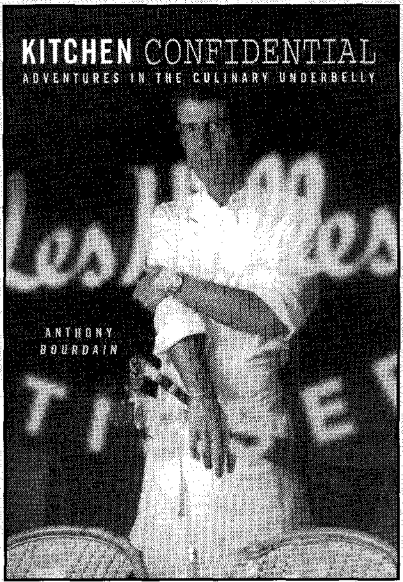

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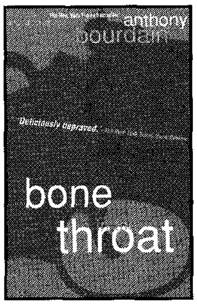

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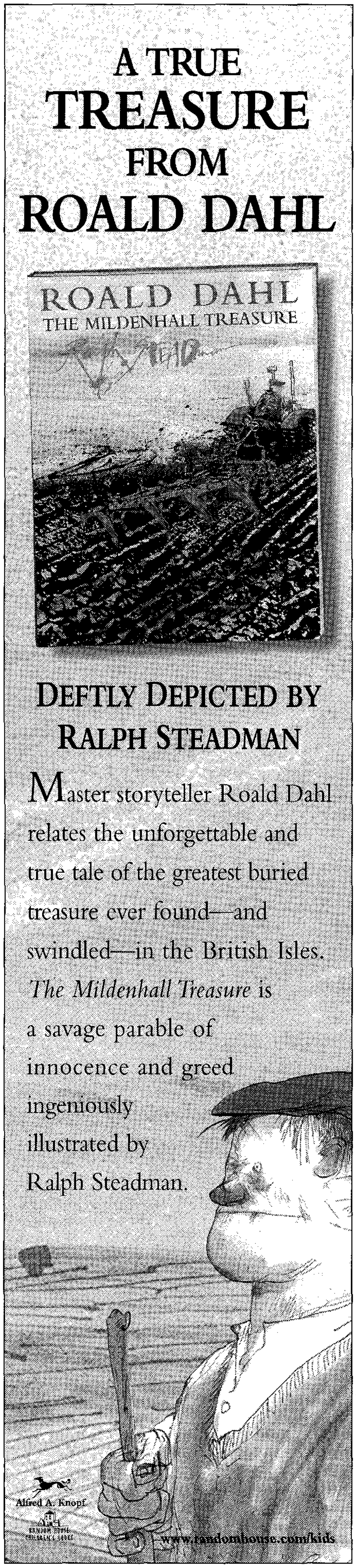
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THE ART WORLD

DNART

A show embraces biomania.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Here's how the artist Eduardo Kac made one of the works in "Paradise Now," a show at Exit Art in which thirty-nine artists address themes of genetics and biotechnology. Kac condensed a verse from Genesis: "Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." He translated it first into Morse code, and then, using a system of his own devising, into four-lettered genetic code. With the sequence that resulted—"GTCCA" and so on, very catchy—he fashioned a gene and introduced it into live bacteria. Kac cultured the bacteria in a petri dish, which he rigged with a video camera. The apparatus occupies an elegantly designed booth in this show. A magnified, real-time image of the microbe colony is projected onto the wall and, at the same time, broadcast on the Internet. Kac's Web site (www.ekac.org) is interactive. With the click of a mouse from afar, you can zap the bacteria with ultraviolet light, creating mutations. You thereby rewrite the Bible, see. I think that we are meant to like this consequence, Scripture being politically *retardataire*, or whatever. Meanwhile, one can't help noticing that Kac has taken dominion over living things to a level undreamed of in the Pentateuch. Is the irony of the work profound? It may only be clever.

This manic show, which will be up until October 28th, is a sort of petri dish itself, propagating a hot trend. The curators, Marvin Heiferman and Carole Kismaric, include some works from the misty prehistory of today's biocraze—that is, older than three or four years. Back in 1993, the collector Isabel Goldsmith asked the painter Steve Miller to do her portrait. He responded by submitting a sample of her blood to a process that produced electron-microscope photographs of her chromosomes. He then tricked these up into a big acrylic-and-enamel painting. It's not a very interesting picture unless you have a soft spot for jittery X shapes, but it qualifies Miller as a prophet. Most of the show is dated 1999 or 2000, testifying to a bandwagon in full career. The collective energy level, which is zestful and infectious, helps one suspend judgment about the merits of the individual works as art. This is just as well. Actually, judging is seldom called for with thematic stuff like this, which has the shelf life of milk. If you wish it would go away, you'll be gratified anon. "Paradise Now" typifies a recurrent phenomenon, whereby denizens of the fragmented and generally aimless art world jump on a breaking story in the culture at large. The last such vogue was broadly cybernetic, and I much prefer the new one. It's so much warmer and squishier. Beyond that, I'm incurious about my computer, but my DNA concerns me.

Notice that I just said "my" DNA. Do I, in fact, own this tangle of immemorial instructions as I own a copy of Windows 98? Here's a nifty conundrum for the conceptual artists Larry Miller (no relation to Steve) and Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle. Miller presents elaborate certificates of copyright and license for a friend's DNA. Manglano-Ovalle rolls out two hefty steel storage tanks that preserve sperm in liquid nitrogen. The temperature inside is minus three hundred and twenty-one degrees Fahrenheit, it says here. Also chilly is a display of contracts between the artist and one of the sperm producers—spelling out, among other things, the artist's responsibility for the puissant gunk's indefinite survival. The lid of one tank is pink, and the other blue, the sperm having been separated out by sex.

What makes these exercises art? Well, what else might they reasonably be? They perform tasks that no one assigned. They involve real work that is really gratuitous. In a world of tightly knit job descriptions, that's dis-

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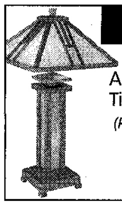

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background. The costume designer, Theoni Aldredge, has made their dresses and hairdos speak hilarious volumes: the cool, demure, no-nonsense intelligence of Mrs. Russell (Michael Learned) is broadcast by her robin's-egg-blue tailored suit and short-cropped gray hair; the vulgarity of the lower-middle-class Mrs. Cantwell (Christine Ebersole) by her turquoise dress and big hair; and the assertiveness of Mrs. Sue-Ellen Gamadge (Elizabeth Ashley), the Southern broad and queen bee of the women's division, by her florid grayish-blue and purple outfits. All the actresses do well. Mrs. Gamadge ("rhymes with damage") has the best innings in the script, and Ashley makes the most of them. In a husky drawl, she admonishes Russell, "Your wife should be at your side at all times. She must *seem* to be advising you. The women must feel that there is a woman behind you." In her unabashed autobiography, "Actress," Ashley writes, "I have to have my cake and eat it too because if I don't have my cake I can't eat." It's a line, and a rapacious thought, worthy of "The Best Man," in which, as the political juggernaut picks up steam, Russell's people uncover a sordid tale of Cantwell's homosexuality in the Navy (subsequently proved false) and prepare to release it to the press, in an effort to neutralize Cantwell and scupper his bid for office. (The toadying, rumpled Pecksniff who comes forward to destroy Cantwell is memorably played by Jonathan Hadary.)

In the end, of course, Russell drops out of the race, throwing his large bloc of votes to a nobody who is instantly a somebody. "Men without faces tend to get elected President," Russell says, "and power or responsibility or honor fill in the features, usually pretty well." The critic's job is to rumble society's received opinions, "to tease his audience"—as Vidal writes in the introduction to "The Best Man"—"into asking the right questions." The play leads, it seems to me, to provocative conclusions. With its corrupt maneuvers and its exhausting calculations, the despotism of monarchy—for which America's democracy was supposed to be the antidote—has been replaced by a less visible tyranny: the despotism of the consensus. As another master of the epigram, Joe Orton, said, "All classes are criminal. We live in an age of equality." ♦

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opponent for the Presidential nomination is a slick, God-fearing, morally impeccable political opportunist named Cantwell.

"The Best Man" has seventeen characters, but, in a sense, its best-drawn and most important character remains resolutely offstage: the American electorate. Tocqueville was the first to spot the electorate's inherent comic potential. "They want to be led, and they wish to remain free," he wrote, in 1832. In other words, they are sheep, who every four years get to choose their shepherd. Tocqueville compared the delirium of a Presidential election to a river overflowing its banks and then subsiding to its usual level: "Who can refrain from astonishment that such a storm should have arisen?" With the echo of Sousa marches, the huzzahs of the crowd, the blinding flash of popping cameras, "The Best Man" opens in the face of such an electoral storm.

The curtain comes up with Russell perched serenely on his high horse. "I don't believe in polls," he announces, adding, "Life is not a popularity contest: neither is politics." Spalding Gray, as Russell, lacks the crisp, commanding vigor of his lines, and this somewhat skews the battle of wits between him and Cantwell (the persuasive Chris Noth). Nonetheless, Gray's preppy outline and his familiar droll irony are sufficient to convey a sense of Russell's intelligent distinction—which the plot soon muddies. Russell, a former Secretary of State, has all the mental prerequisites for the job but, we soon learn, cannot fulfill the nation's quasi-religious fantasy of purity in the Presidential office. He has a show wife and a sweet tooth for women; he also has a history of "mental illness," and this is the wild card that Cantwell threatens to throw on the convention floor, unless Russell immediately withdraws his candidacy. Into this combustible equation Vidal factors the dying populist ex-President Art Hockstader, a canny politician from, as he calls it, "the Age of the Great Hicks," who must choose which candidate to throw his considerable weight behind. With Charles Durning playing Hockstader, this weight is more than political. As he waddles between enemy camps, Durning's belly precedes him by a few feet. Short, flat-footed, pudding-faced, and fierce, he lends a wonderful specific gravity to Hockstader's bravado and to his hidden darkness. And when Cantwell raises the "moral issue" of Russell's promiscuity to the ex-President, Durning-Hockstader, in all his proletarian glory, brings down the house. "I couldn't care less," he says. "I was brought up on a farm and the lesson of the rooster was not entirely lost on me. A lot of men need a lot of women, and there are worse faults, let me tell you."

Vidal (center) with Durning and Ashley as two of the most powerful players in his political game. Photograph by Larry Fink.

Throughout the machinations, the political women cluck and connive in the

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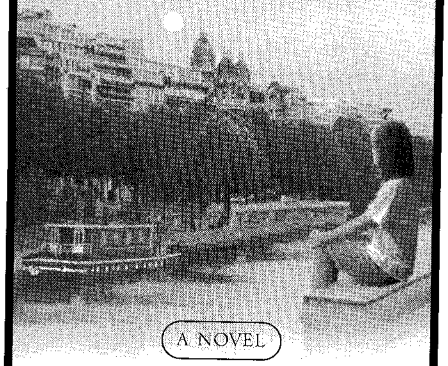

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WAY OF THE WORLD

Gore Vidal turns realpolitik into real entertainment.

BY JOHN LAHR

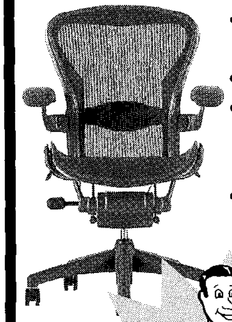
Reader, get your pencil and write this down. "The Essential Gore Vidal," pages 808-824, wherein our hero (and his own) says:

> Politicians working within a system like ours can never be much more than what the system will allow. Hypocrisy and self-deception are the traditional characteristics of the middle class in any place and time, and the United States today is the paradigmatic middle-class society. Therefore we can hardly blame our political gamesman for being, literally, representative. Any public man has every right to try and trick us, not only for his own good but, if he is honorable, for ours as well. However, if he himself is not aware of what he is doing or to what end he is playing the game, then to entrust him with the first magistracy of what may be the last empire on earth is to endanger us all.

Vidal is a serious reader and writer who has pondered hard the questions of private and public life. He is now seventy-four—as he says, "in the springtime of my senility"—and he has been famous since he was in his early twenties. He ran for Congress as a Democrat in New York, in 1960, and briefly for the Senate, in California, in 1982. But even without personal fame his patrician pedigree would have guaranteed him access to just about everybody. (His maternal grandfather was Thomas Pryor Gore, the senator from Oklahoma, and Vidal, a step-brother of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, is also a not-so-distant cousin of the current Democratic Presidential candidate.) Vidal has not just sniffed the hem of power; he has lived his adult life under its skirt. So when he talks about politics, as he does in his 1960 play "The Best Man" (revived at the Virginia, directed by Ethan McSweeney), you'd be silly—no, a doofus—not to listen. In American theatre, there have been outstanding plays about the politics of fear (Arthur Miller), about the politics of business (David Mamet), about the politics of family (Lillian Hellman), even about the politics of gender (Tony Kushner), but the politics of politics has, for the most part, been too daunting for the stage's two-hour traffic, probably because playwrights other than Vidal can't get behind the closed doors. When Vidal talks about "The Best Man," which was filmed in 1964, he usually invokes "The Front Page" and "The Little Foxes." He is too much of a realist not to know that "The Best Man" doesn't quite reach those heights of commercial glory; nonetheless, it is a sophisticated, elegant, and damnably entertaining play, whose *mots* are as eerily accurate for Shrub and Al as they were, originally, for Adlai and Tricky Dick.

No one pisses from quite the height that Vidal does. In his detachment, he is too clear-eyed to hate and too knowing to be grave. His goal, it seems to me, is to teach, which is why he so often writes in epigrams. He doesn't want to be remembered; he wants to be memorized. One of the best of many shrewd observations in "The Best Man," which takes place over three days of a Presidential convention, is a throwaway line delivered by the intellectual front-runner, William Russell (played here by Spalding Gray), who observes of some speechifying pol on TV, "He has every characteristic of a dog, except loyalty."

These days, when every sacred cow pastures in the U.S.A., this kind of wit is tonic. But "The Best Man" is not a satire; it is built to last longer than Saturday night. In both its symmetry and its skepticism, it has a distinctly neoclassical flavor; the play is really a comedy of manners—or, rather, of bad political manners. Its drama shares with the eighteenth century an obsession with the invention, the manipulation, and the exposure of façade. ("From now on we project blandness," Russell says, vowing at the convention's outset to abandon ideas and to smile "serenely, fatuously, ineluctably.") Vidal even borrows the genre's convention of telegraphing a character's attributes in a surname; Russell's



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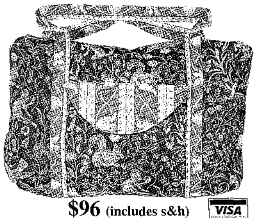

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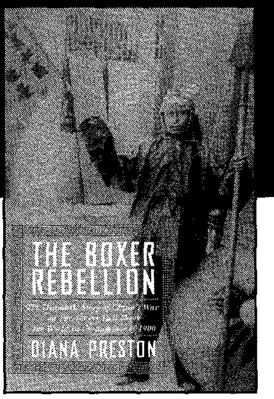
neral), Sand was both before her time and quintessentially of it. Jack's nuanced, moving assessment of the writer's early years—the awakening of her intense pleasure in life and in literature, as well as her complicated relationship with her often absent mother, Sophie-Victoire, and the influence of her formidable paternal grandmother—is the strongest section of this packed life. When Sand moves onto a larger stage, Jack's style becomes breathless, as if she could barely keep up with her flamboyant subject.

Talking Dirty to the Gods, *by Yusef Komunyakaa (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $23).* Komunyakaa's mournful surrealism seems to have found a perfect mathematical embodiment in this, his eleventh collection, which comprises a hundred and thirty-two poems of four four-line stanzas. These are poems about the uncontrollable human and natural mysteries, and they are made sharper and more mysterious by the eternal recurrence of the stanzaic structure. Komunyakaa's lexical and historical range is large, and his improvisations move effortlessly from Theocritus to Rimbaud, Chet Baker, and the Black Panthers. But, attentive though he is to the violence of the imagination, he also invokes a serene, classical order that might, or might not, lie at its center.

Flophouse, *text by David Isay and Stacy Abramson, photographs by Harvey Wang (Random House; $24.95).* In the first half of the twentieth century, when the Bowery was a teeming skid row, tens of thousands of men slept each night in its myriad cheap rooming houses, in cubicles smaller than prison cells. Today, about a thousand inhabit the strip's eight remaining hotels, paying as little as four-fifty a night for the privilege. In this extraordinary book (which grew out of a radio documentary Isay and Abramson produced in 1998), fifty of these men deliver a heartbreaking litany of the self-destruction and misfortune that brought them there. Wang's portraits wrest his subjects from the murk and dinge of their surroundings, investing even the most hopeless with dignity. And if the poetic diction of the Bowery bums described by Joseph Mitchell was ultimately in part his own, the unvarnished testimony recorded by Isay and Abramson turns out to be just as colorful, articulate, and moving.



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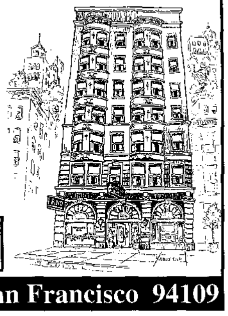

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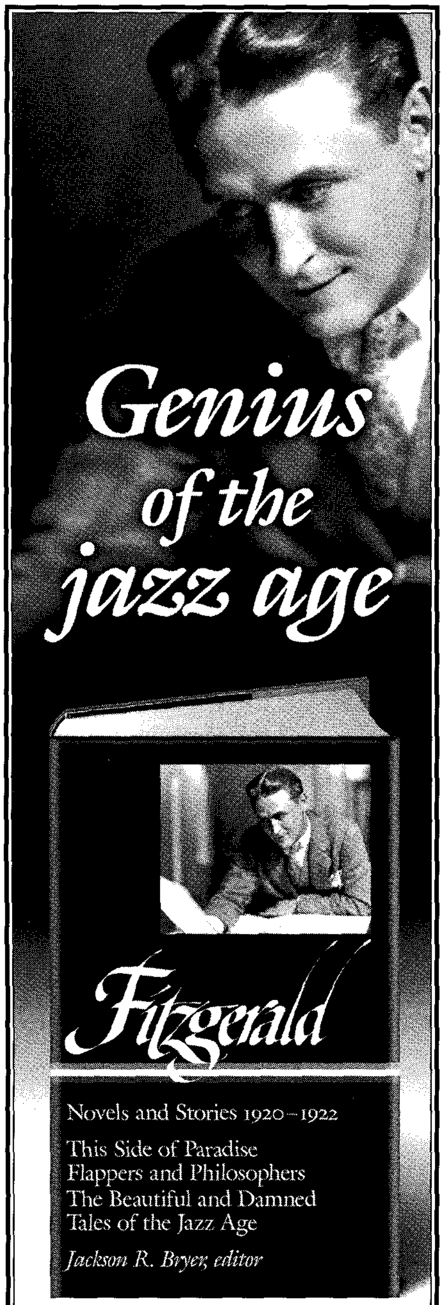

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BRIEFLY NOTED

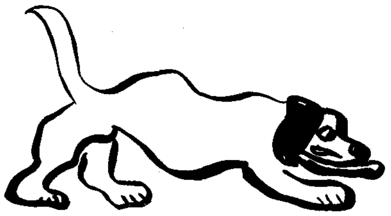
Four Blondes, *by Candace Bushnell (Atlantic Monthly; $24).* In these four novellas, the naughty columnist ("Sex and the City") confronts the postmodern dilemma of reclaiming her creative territory from a hit TV series that improved on the original. The show has better plotlines—here Bushnell's blondes tend to make unconvincing last-minute transformations from doormats to ass-kickers. But her ironies are competitive ("He was the most generous man she'd ever been with—not just monetarily but spiritually and emotionally as well") and the sexual situations are more realistically sordid than anything on television. Her place as the Emily Post for Page Six canoodlers remains unchallenged: consider the recent ex who consoles a spurned blonde by messengering her a five-thousand-dollar Gucci gift certificate.

The Mineral Palace, *by Heidi Julavits (Putnam; $23.95).* At the height of the Great Depression, Bena Jonssen dutifully travels with her physician husband and newborn son from their native St. Paul to a new post in Pueblo, Colorado. As she attempts to suppress suspicions about the fitness of her own marriage, Bena starts writing for the local paper, and she finds that sexual corruption is rotting away what passes for society in Pueblo. In this richly atmospheric first novel, Julavits transposes a Faulknerian gothic to a parched Rocky Mountain setting: her heroine's discovery turns out to be as much a symptom of her obsessive fears as proof that they were justified.

Assorted Fire Events, *by David Means (Context; $22).* Tragedy strikes in nearly all the stories in this austere collection: a wealthy man is beaten to death near a railway track; a pyromaniac gets caught in his own fire; a recent widow shows a suitor an old videotape of herself making love to her husband. Grief, though, is merely a leaping-off point. Incidents that might seem melodramatic in the hands of another writer lead instead to crystalline reflections on the limits of self-knowledge and the ways in which our past fails to define us. What most interests the author, perhaps, is potential: his fractured story lines—which often chart several paths of narrative action—are successful primarily because he knows how to get at what he calls "our own insatiable desire for another time and place."

Edgar Cayce: An American Prophet, *by Sidney D. Kirkpatrick (Riverhead; $30).* This engaging biography reads like a codex for the New Age. Born in 1877 in rural Christian County, Kentucky, Cayce became a professional portrait photographer, but he regularly gave "trance readings" for the sick on the side. These readings, in which he made accurate medical diagnoses and prescribed effective treatments for thousands of patients, eventually made him so famous that Thomas Edison wrote to him about the properties of psychic phenomena and Marilyn Monroe followed his beauty tips. Cayce was less successful, however, when he turned his psychic talents to oil speculation, treasure hunting, and screenplay writing. ("Bride of the Inca," a scenario intended for Gloria Swanson, was rejected as "not very interesting.") All the author's talk of dreams, hypnosis, and sex in past incarnations cries out for a little Freudian interpretation, but none is on offer. Instead, Kirkpatrick provides details and sympathy and lets the bizarre facts of his subject's life speak for themselves.

George Sand: A Woman's Life Writ Large, *by Belinda Jack (Knopf; $30).* "Life is a novel that each of us carries within us," wrote George Sand, née Amandine-Aurore-Lucile Dupin, whose own story, surely, was lived in the spirit of *un grand roman.* Prodigious author, cross-dresser, lover of Chopin and Alfred de Musset, intimate of (among others) Liszt, Balzac, Dumas (*père* and *fils*), Turgenev, and Flaubert (who cried twice at her fu-



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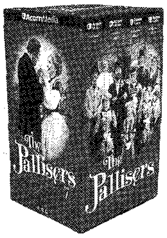

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Compare that mordancy to Flashman's fretfulness in "The Road to Charing Cross," where he is dragooned into helping forestall a plot to kill the Austrian emperor. Flashman complains that "poor inoffensive poltroons like me had to contend with murderous maniacs in defence of some useless Hapsburg idiot who knew no better than to give his women social diseases." Similarly, he dismisses the Balkans as a "disgusting" region, "full of people who'd much rather massacre each other than not." Flashman's judgments, once based on a soldier's careful study, now reveal only a clubman's calcified cast of mind; the character's physical decline has been matched by a loss of verve and acuity on the part of the author. Perhaps Amis and Waugh were wise in not allowing their comic foils to age, to become pillars of an establishment they had mocked. As Shakespeare's Prince Hal said of Falstaff, Flashman's peer in whoring, lying, and poltroonery, "How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!"

Fraser's Flashman books have earned him a secure place among the writers of historical corkers, below Patrick O'Brian but on the same high shelf as Alexandre Dumas, Rafael Sabatini, and James Fenimore Cooper. Like them, he has conjured up a past infinitely more compelling than the college-lecture version: one rife with noble rhetoric (which Flashman derides), gunfire (which Flashman flees), and damsels in distress (where Flashman leaves them). And now it's time to repay Flashman for the pleasures he has given us by granting his lifelong wish for peace and ease. Let him be conked on the head no more. Let him seek out a tufted armchair by the fire, settle himself with a brandy and a good book—perhaps an earlier volume in this series—and drowse off into retirement at last. ♦

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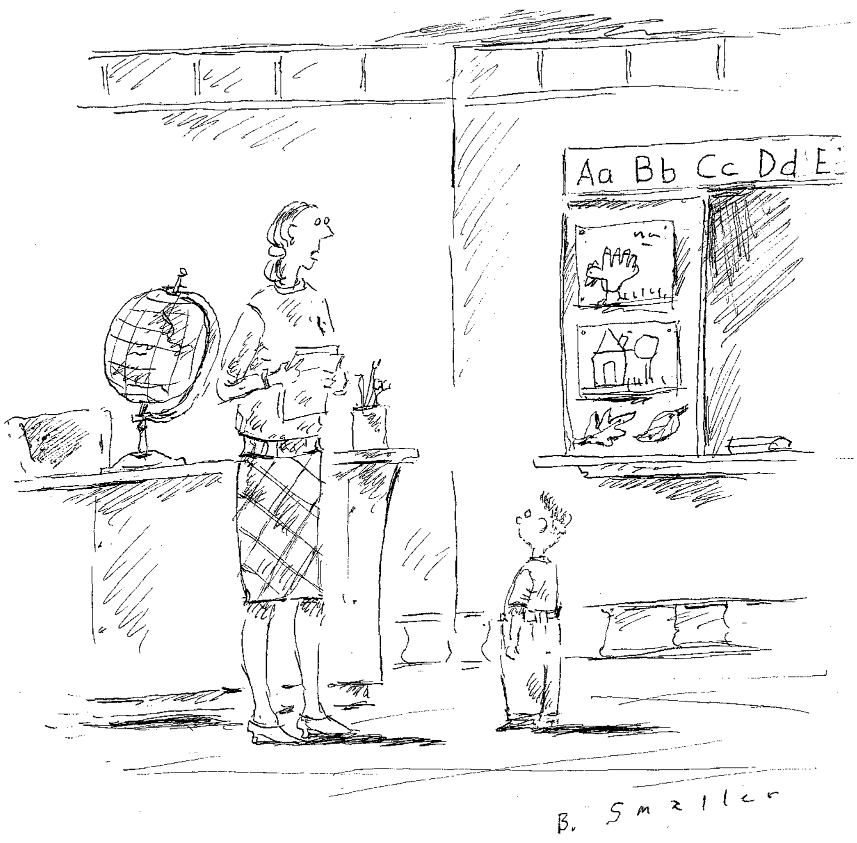
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intake of breath, the faint smile followed by the quick shake of the head.”

Such are the survival measures of a modern man stuck in an age of sanctimony. Flashman believes that identity is not acquired or bestowed so much as rehearsed. In “Flashman in the Great Game,” he observes:

> I’ve been a Danish prince, a Texas slave-dealer, an Arab sheik, a Cheyenne Dog Soldier, and a Yankee navy lieutenant in my time, and none of ’em was as hard to sustain as my lifetime’s impersonation of a British officer and gentleman. The truth is we all live under false pretences much of the time; you just have to put on a bold front and brazen it through.

It is one of Fraser’s shrewdest strokes that Sir Harry Flashman, V.C., poisonously antisocial in most ways, is eminently Victorian when it comes to his reputation. In “The Road to Charing Cross,” the longest novella in “Flashman and the Tiger,” Flashman has to persevere with a dangerous mission because if he were to bolt “my credit, my fame would be blown away; I’d be disgraced, ruined, outcast; the Queen would be *quite shocked*.”

For years, Flashman’s epithet of choice for the dodderers who sent him galloping into ambush was “old fool.” He was firmly in the tradition of those great comic novels that feature a sensible young chap quietly resisting—or loudly denouncing—the follies of his elders. Like Flashman, such characters as Evelyn Waugh’s William Boot and Kingsley Amis’s Jim Dixon made revolutionary observations but were the opposite of revolutionaries: they simply wanted to be left in peace.

But though Flashman’s pacifism arose from cowardice, it had a moral edge. In “Flashman,” he sketched Lord Cardigan, later famed in the Crimea for ordering his light brigade to charge into the valley of death:

> His nose was beaky and his eyes blue and prominent and unwinking—they looked out on the world with that serenity which marks the nobleman whose uttermost ancestor was

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Flashman, for his part, suggests that his lusty rogering of the rani is the real reason that she conspires to make her Sikh armies fail, and that India is saved for the British Crown. He snickers both at his countrymen's complacent faith that the Empire was divinely ordained and at the Hegelian view that history is determined by sweeping sociocultural tides. "In my experience," Flashman says, "the course of history is as often settled by someone's having a belly-ache, or not sleeping well, or a sailor getting drunk, or some aristocratic harlot wagging her backside."

Fraser's larger point is that human affairs are an indecipherable muddle until afterward, when someone like Flashman tells a convincing tale. In the new collection, this belief is neatly illustrated by "The Subtleties of Baccarat," an account of Flashman's handiwork in the Tranby Croft affair, which began in 1890 when William Gordon-Cumming was caught (apparently) cheating at baccarat during a houseparty at Tranby Croft. The Prince of Wales was present, and sought to forestall the gossip. Flashman characterizes the discussion at this coverup meeting as plaintive volleys of " 'What is to be done?'—five words which are as sound a motto for disaster as I know." (Fraser surely intends us to think of Lenin's famous pamphlet of that name.)

Flashman insures that the scandal will break, and watches complacently as reputations are destroyed. Then his wife, Elspeth, confesses over breakfast (sausage, coffee, brandy) that she used sleight of hand to make it appear that Gordon-Cumming was cheating. She was paying him back for his having told her, years before, that Harry was a coward. Flashman is shocked, both because she has never penetrated his own dastardliness and because he, sharing his era's view of wives, had always imagined Elspeth a harmless ninny.

The masquerades of others shouldn't surprise Flashman, because acting is his own crowning talent. He has a knack for seeming modest, manly, and Christian—"a chap who says his prayers in a cold bath." The trick of lying abed when battle looms, he explains, is to "always convey, but *never* say, that your injury is a sight worse than it really is, [using] the barely perceptible wince, the sharp little

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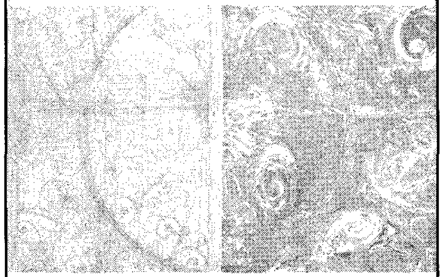

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life, and in the privacy of these pages, Flashman lets on that his fame is a complete fluke and hoax, and that he is actually "a scoundrel, a liar, a cheat, a thief, a coward—and, oh yes, a toady."

Flashman forgot "brute, murderer, borderline sociopath." He shoots an Indian mutineer in the gut, hoping it will take him days to die; he sells a courtesan who loves him to the Navajo for two thousand dollars; he brutally rapes a dancing girl. And he has no shame, ever. His is a temperament ideally suited for driving slaves in Mississippi (which he did in "Flash for Freedom!"). Fortunately, he's amusing company. In "Flashman's Lady," a rival for the affections of Flashman's wife bellows at him that he's unworthy of her:

> "Didn't I see you with my own eyes? Coupling with that slut in my own library—"
> "Drawing-room—"
> "—that harlot Lade? Isn't your name a byword in London for debauchery and vice, for every kind of lewdness and depravity?"
> "Not every kind! I never—"

Flashman's signature act is not the last-ditch defense of a crucial redoubt but the high-speed flight, while frantically buttoning his trousers, from an unfamiliar bedroom. Strive as he might to avoid trouble, the carousing Flashman always lands in the midst of it. Then he gets knocked out. And when he wakes it's usually in an enemy dungeon. Over the years, he has been whipped, racked, roasted, tried by poison, and roped into a tug-of-war across a snake pit with a hideous dwarf, and he has always been quick to sob out whatever his torturers wanted to hear. (His stout-hearted reputation is such that his captor has usually lashed on, believing his whimpers to be a cunning ploy.)

The trash index dips in "Flashman and the Tiger," three novellas about late, minor episodes in his career: he is knocked out only twice, and once it's with spiked coffee, which hardly counts. Yet this downtick reflects not an increase in authorial rumination but a marked decrease in Flashman's appetite for trouble. In the title novella, Flashman allows, "You think twice about committing murder when you're over seventy . . . knowing that your speed and cunning have been undermined by a lifetime of booze and evil living." Elsewhere in the book, he acknowledges having "reached what Macaulay calls the years of chicken broth and flannel, when you realise how dam' ridiculous you'd look chasing dollymops young enough to be your daughter." Now that he's too pooped to swashbuckle, can Flashman still hold our attention?

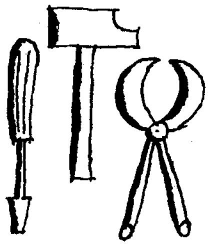
The joy of reading Flashman has always lain in his contempt for every piety. He combines the swagger of D'Artagnan with the nihilistic authority of Daffy Duck. With his utter disregard for women save as conquests—when introduced to Florence Nightingale, he notes that she is "well set up and titted out"—and his lordly scorn for "wops," "sheenies," "frogs," "dagos," and "krauteaters," Flashman exemplifies all the worst aspects of the era that made the British Empire great.

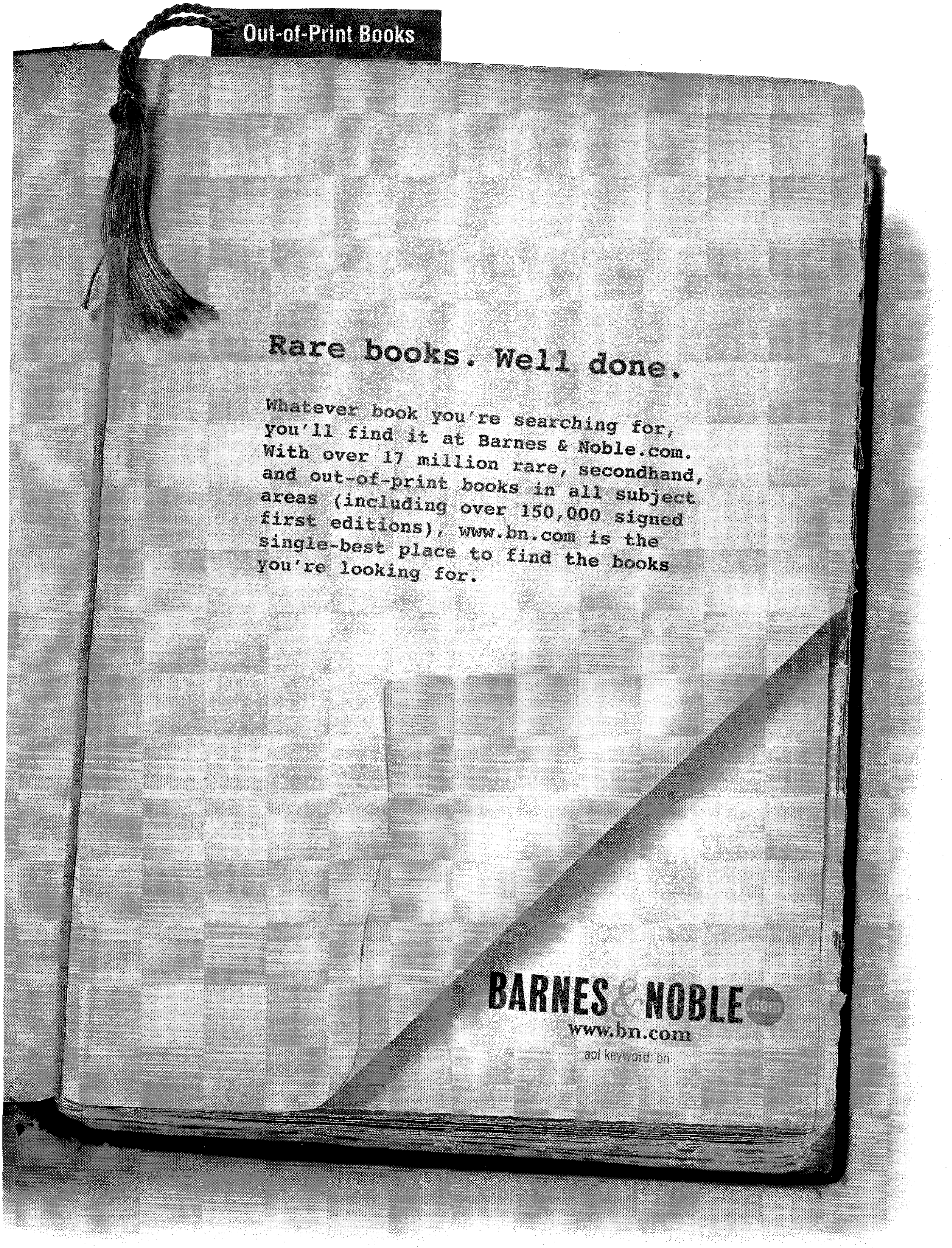
He is particularly adept at dragging a muddy boot heel through kiss-me-Hardy death scenes. Scud East, an old schoolmate, prayerfully seeks Flashman's forgiveness as they wait to die during the siege at Cawnpore:

> "Please, Flashman, you must see my agony of spirit. . . . Tell me, even now, what I can do."
> "Well," says I, thoughtfully, "you could go and fart in a bottle and paint it."

And he has a gimlet eye for hypocrisy. In "Flashman and the Mountain of Light," Flashman observes that his superior officer, George Broadfoot (a genuine historical figure, like most of Fraser's characters), is in a swivet because Flashman's diplomatic mission to a debauched Indian rani may require his services as gigolo:

> He had the conscience of his time, you see, Bible-reared and shunning sin, and the thought that my success in Lahore might depend on fornication set him a fine ethical problem. . . . Of course, if it had been slaughter, not adultery, that was necessary, none of my pious generation would even have blinked—soldier's duty, you see.





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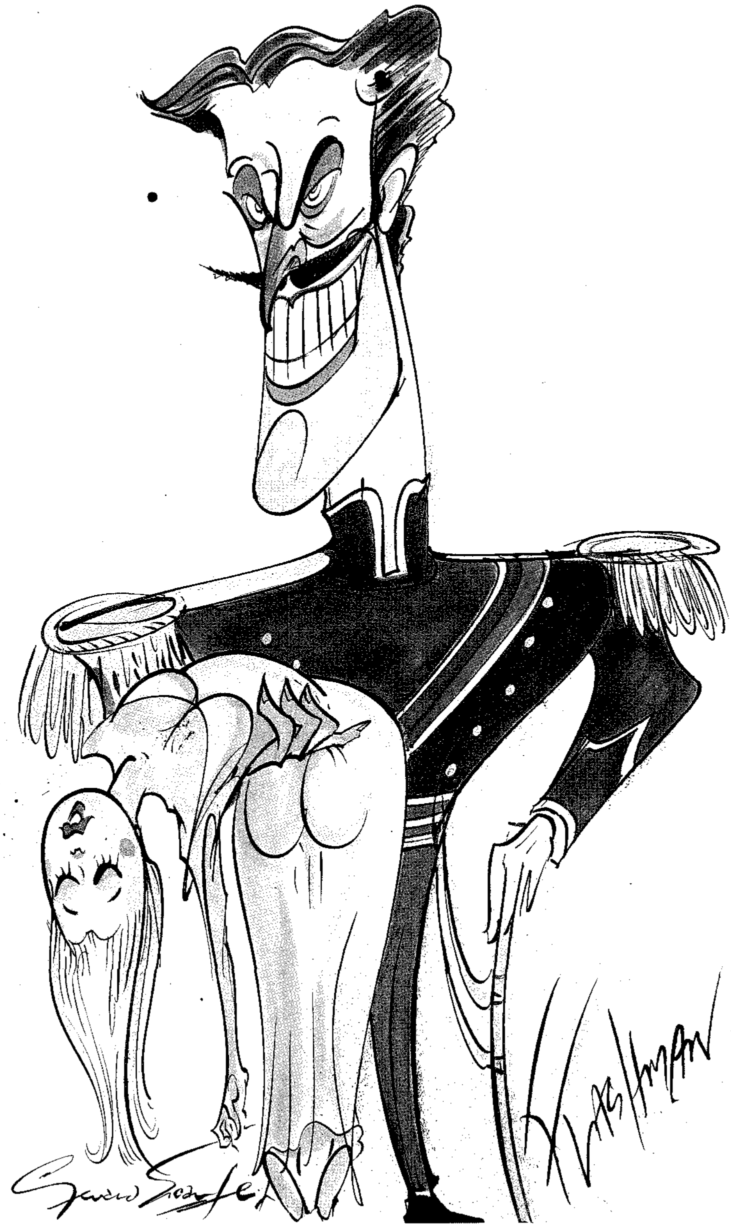
The sun never sets on Flashman, Britain's imperial rogue.

BY TAD FRIEND



In George MacDonald Fraser's "Flashman" series, deception is the better part of valor.

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When a novelist needs to advance a stuck plot, one sure trick is to have someone conk the hero on the noggin. A knockout functions like a blackout in the theatre, or like a commercial on TV: it's an interruption that directs our attention to a new setting. Lights out; turn page. Lights up: the hero wakes either in a hospital bed or else in the clutches of the villain, who gloats awhile and then pounds him back into unconsciousness. The number of knockouts per hundred pages is a useful indicator of how much a novel is weighted toward action over character and philosophy—of its trash index.

In the hundred-and-ninety-one-page "Goldfinger," James Bond takes four unplanned siestas. In the thousand-and-sixty-one-page, much less trashy "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, Frodo is flattened three times. In the thirteen-hundred-and-fifteen-page, not at all trashy "War and Peace," Prince Andrew is K.O.'d but once, by cannon fire. And at the far end of the spectrum lies the three-thousand-two-hundred-and-ninety-four-page, decidedly knockout-free "Remembrance of Things Past." It's difficult to imagine the Duchess of Guermantes goosing the plot by clapping a chloroform-soaked rag over Marcel's mouth. (It takes Marcel a thousand pages just to go to sleep.)

By contrast, readers of George MacDonald Fraser's "Flashman" novels may have noticed that Harry Flashman is developing something of a glass jaw. In the first volume, "Flashman" (1969), he was knocked out once. In the sixth, "Flashman and the Redskins," it happened three times. In the ninth, "Flashman and the Angel of the Lord," he was sapped twice in just eight pages. In the eleventh and newest volume, "Flashman and the Tiger" (Knopf; $25), he concludes wearily, "I've been laid out, and come to with a head throbbing like an engine-room, more often than most fellows."

The trash index looks high, and yet concussions would seem to be an occupational hazard for a nineteenth-century soldier of fortune like Flashman. He was originally a minor character—a bully at the Rugby School—in the Victorian novel "Tom Brown's Schooldays," by Thomas Hughes. More than a century later, Fraser, a former journalist and British soldier, started wondering what might have become of the young lout and resurrected him in "Flashman" (1969), a racy treatment of the First Afghan War and the exploits that made Harry Flashman a national hero at age nineteen. Fraser's conceit is that Flashman is writing his memoirs in his eighties: each subsequent book dusted off a famous debacle from which he emerged with yet more laurels—the Sepoy Rebellion, the Charge of the Light Brigade, John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, and Custer's Last Stand, among others. Bluff, burly, as English as roast beef, Flashman is unexcelled at horsemanship, languages, cricket, and derring-do. But in the twilight of his

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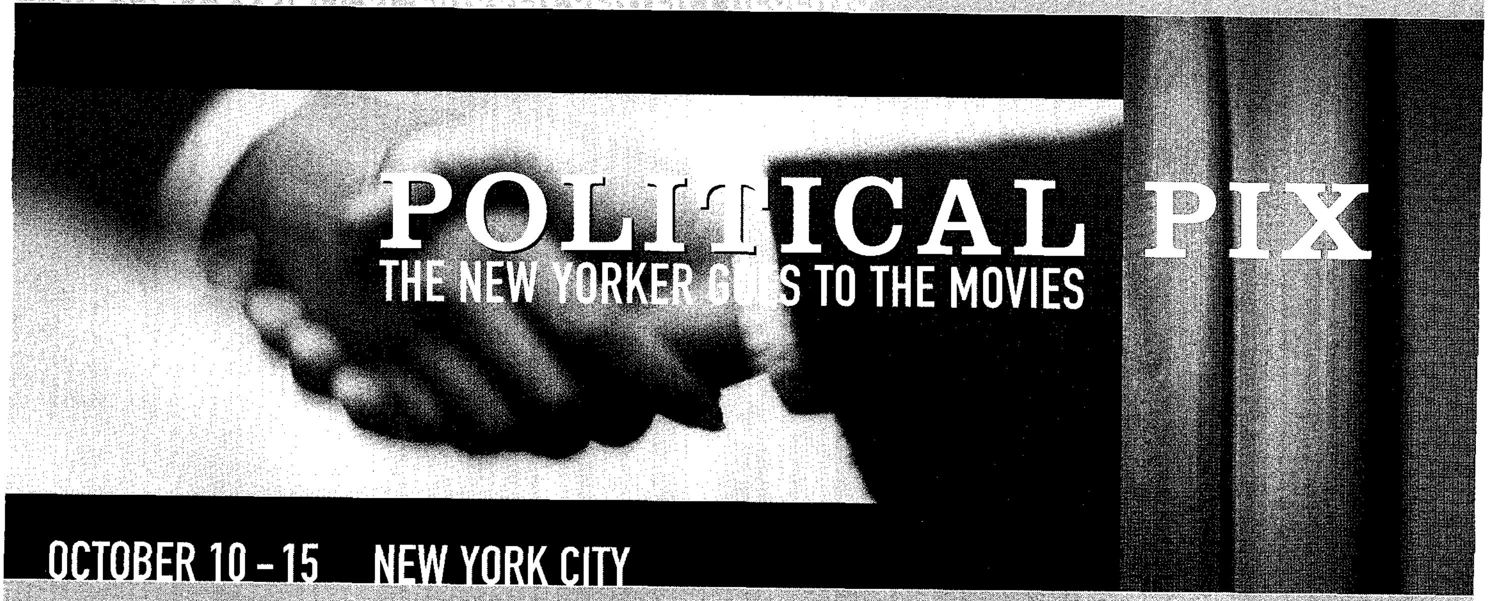

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Seventeen Years (1999, FABRICA)
This Zhang Yuan film tells the tale of a woman who reunites with her family after a 17-year sentence for murder.
Oct. 14 at 6:40 PM

The Battle of Chile (1977)
Patricio Guzmán's epic three-part chronicle of Chile's peaceful socialist revolution and violent counter-revolution.
Oct. 15 at 4:30 PM

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task: they are supposed to reassure us that somewhere someone is having more sex than we are, and with better-looking people; is going to more exciting parties, checking into nicer rehab clinics, buying more airplanes, and generally living it up. When Joe Lieberman and Lynne Cheney and others castigate Hollywood for its surfeit of sex and violence, they keep this dream alive. Their charge—that entertainment engenders the behavior it portrays—suggests that if only we watch enough movies, play enough video games, or listen to enough CDs, we, too, can partake of the glorious debauchery of the stars. Smith tells us that there is no such other world, even in Hollywood: that movie stars are just like the rest of us—imperfect, of course, and vulnerable, but, at bottom, filled with goodness and a longing to be loved.

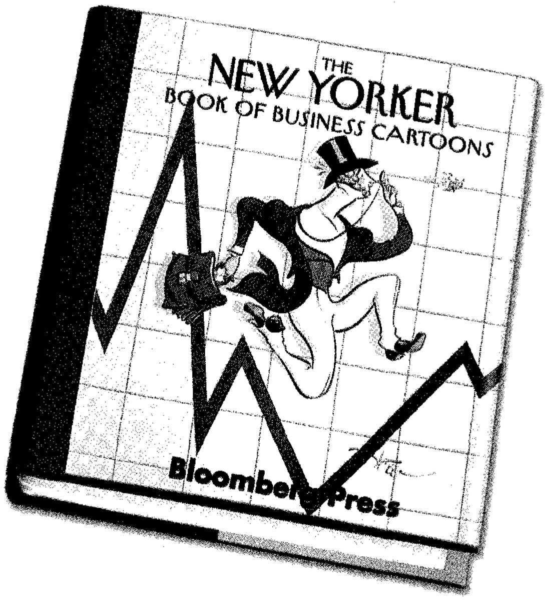
But Liz Smith doesn't merely strip celebrities of their aura. Such is her modernist rigor that often her columns will remove even the event or quotation or context with which you might normally introduce a celebrity: she will run an item that is simply a string of names. In one recent column, she published a list of celebrities with birthdays in September; in another, a list of the expected attendees of a party. In these incantations, Smith has reduced celebrity to its purest essence, the proper noun; she is, with all her devastating literality, the tabloid Gertrude Stein. Describing her mental state upon graduating from high school, Smith writes, "The world was now my oyster, but I had never liked oysters, and once I got one in my mouth, never knew what to do with it." An oyster is an oyster is an oyster. Julia Roberts is Julia Roberts is Julia Roberts. Smith might have written of her life what Stein wrote of her salon, in that sublime gossip column "The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas": "Who else came. There were so many. . . . Everybody came and no one made any difference." ♦

GOLF IS WAR DEPARTMENT

From the magazine Golf Journal.

John Schlee, runner-up to Johnny Miller at the 1973 U.S. Open, died on his 61st birthday June 2 in Costa Mesa, Calif. Schlee, a victim of Miller's final-round 63, won only one PGA Tour event, the 1973 Hawaiian Open.

Very funny business, indeed!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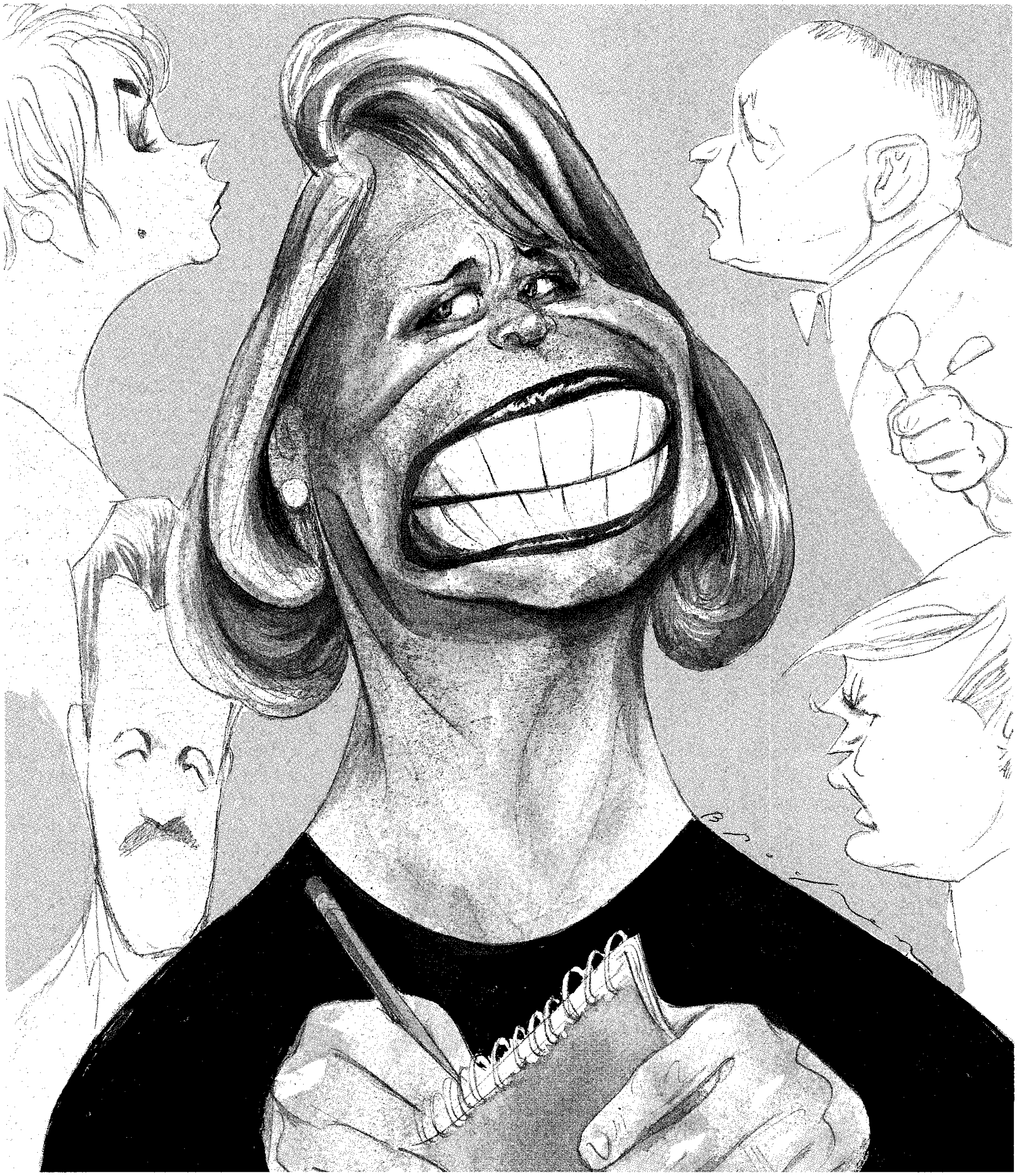
die Lister, but she told him not to tell anyone, in case it didn't work out. Five years later, she found it convenient to get a quickie Mexican divorce (which she describes as "hilarious") while covering the Olympics in Juárez. "What did I get out of my marriage to Freddie?" she muses. "Why, a wonderful, loyal, amusing friendship, some rather stupid playacting in the bedroom. . . . He became my travel agent, of course."

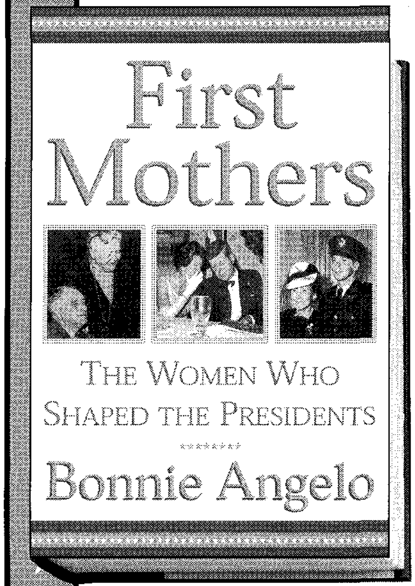
Smith started writing a column under her own name in 1976, and in 1990 she stumbled upon the greatest scoop of her life, when she became Ivana Trump's chosen confidante during her divorce from Donald. It was really this story that made her famous. Alexander Cockburn observed in *The Nation*, "Manhattan's answer to 'Götterdämmerung' is the fissure between the Trumps, and its Wagner is Liz Smith." But in fact Smith's particular gift is to take the operatic and make it downhome, and in so doing she sullies the splendid spectacle of celebrity.

Celebrities, after all, have a cultural



After fifty years in journalism, the columnist Liz Smith has perfected the art of deglamorizing the glamorous.

Before Every President
is a Great Woman



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BOOKS

ALMOST FAMOUS

Liz Smith gossips about gossip.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

Liz Smith has been writing about celebrity for nearly fifty years, and she still writes a nationally syndicated gossip column. She has become something of a celebrity herself: she has been named a Living Landmark by the Landmarks Conservancy of New York; she will soon be immortalized in Madame Tussaud's wax emporium in Times Square; and she is, according to the jacket copy of her just published autobiography, "Natural Blonde" (Hyperion; $25.95), the highest-paid print journalist on the planet. Despite her long and intimate acquaintance with the subject, however, Liz Smith is an enemy of celebrity, and she must be stopped.

Listen to her, for instance, on the subject of Julia Roberts. In a recent interview, Smith told Roberts, "The press likes to paint you as wild, taking drugs, making trouble, picking up and discarding men like Kleenex. But . . . I see you as true blue, a one-man-at-a-time girl." In the memoir, she adds, "Julia is a nice kid from the South who . . . is into growing flowers, doing needlepoint and knitting when on movie sets." How long can a reputation for glamour withstand such terrible details? Smith writes about celebrities in the affectionate tone of an elderly aunt of liberal disposition, to whom the most bizarre sexual antics are merely evidence of fun-loving feistiness, and who will benignly overlook any misdeed whose perpetrator asks her forgiveness. She forgave Nixon. She forgave Donald Trump. She even forgave Frank Sinatra, who, annoyed by her allusions to his mob connections, called her "fat, old and ugly." Would-be villains don't stand a chance—insults roll off Smith like water off a duck.

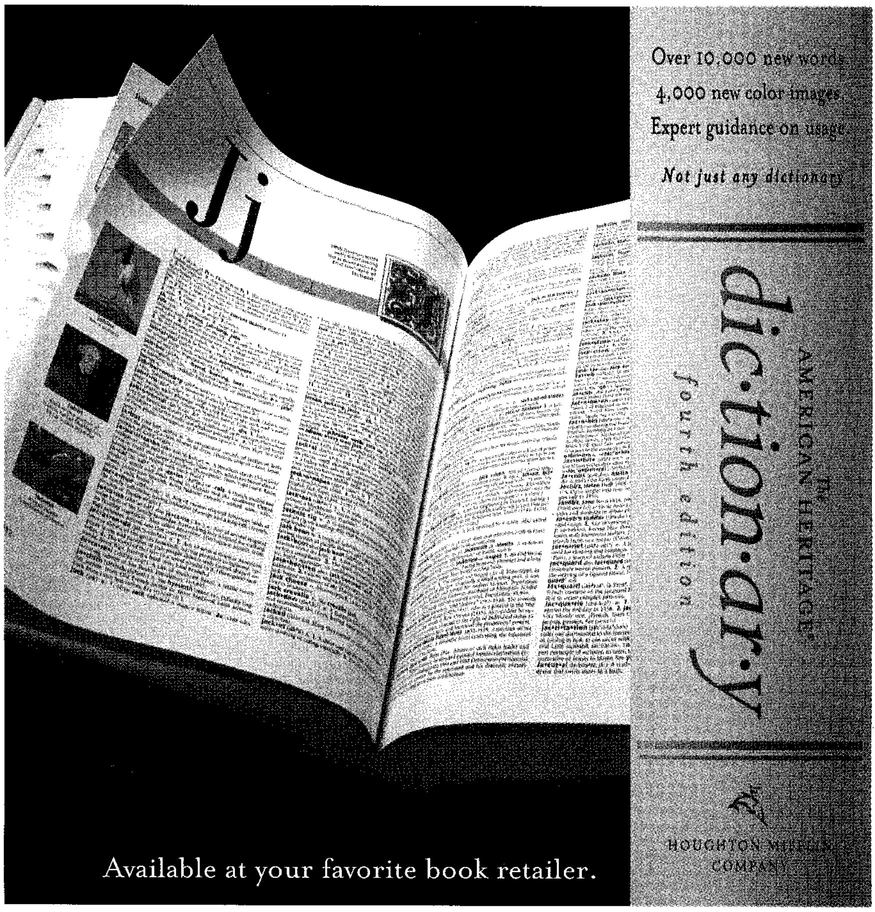
Smith tells even the story of her own life with an insouciant, offhand cheerfulness that is detached to the point of being strangely modernist. She presents herself as a colorful cartoon: the good-time girl from Texas ("old Sunnyside-Up Liz"), with no scars, no grudges, and no regrets. Smith grew up in Fort Worth in the twenties. Her father was a fastidious man who dealt cotton and shaved his armpits; her mother was religious. Her childhood was perfectly pleasant. Her father sent her to sell things—fruit, spurs, parrots—door to door, to foster an entrepreneurial spirit. She had herself baptized twice, because she liked the attention. She slept with her relatives. ("In Texas in those days," she writes, "people thought nothing of popping children into bed with siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents. You can learn a lot sleeping with adults—how they fart, scratch, snore, masturbate, pretend to be asleep when they are not, how they arrange to let you feel them up without noticing.") Throughout her childhood, black people were her "secret passion," she writes, but they were not her only love: every Sunday night, she turned on the radio to listen to Walter Winchell. She got married in her early twenties, to a handsome football player, but then, after a few months of living with him, she got bored and asked for a divorce.

In 1949, Smith moved to New York. She wrote about movie stars at *Modern Screen*, ghosted the Cholly Knickerbocker gossip column, and worked for "Candid Camera." For fifty years, she went to every party and every night club, met everybody, and loved it, every minute. "I'd read that the unexamined life is not worth living," she writes. "But having a high old time and living for the moment was much more my style." She had affairs and near-misses with men, women, and celebrities. She was propositioned in the late eighties by Norman Mailer; Warren Beatty supposedly told a friend he wanted to sleep with her out of curiosity. At one point in the mid-sixties, she married a travel agent from South Africa named Fred-

STEVE BRODNER

was the "power of supposing that ideas are real"; he was convinced that only an "intense and ambivalent sense of history" could fuel that power. He condemned fashionable self-consciousness and self-pity, which he identified as false virtue and light resolve. He eschewed softness. He saw through "the political awareness that is not aware, the social consciousness which hates full consciousness, the moral earnestness which is moral luxury." He saw through his own time, and perhaps through ours.

An inexorable postscript. Any mention of Trilling's name today instantly elicits the recognition that he was the first Jew appointed to Columbia University's permanent English faculty—as if this were the only significant relic of an eminent career. Trilling's triumph erupted on the heels of a humiliating dismissal; he had been fired on the ground that he was a Jew and a Marxist. Attempting to fight back, he secured painful interviews with the men who had ejected him; it was for his own good, they told him, he would not fit in. He overcame this hurdle only to confront another three years later: now it was his promotion from instructor to assistant professor that was in question. Determined yet again to salvage his career, Trilling sent a copy of his dissertation to Nicholas Murray Butler, Columbia's president. Butler chose merit over bigotry—but the harsh perils of this history left Trilling wary ever after. The young writer who was drawn to the *Menorah Journal* for its intellectual and literary standards rose to be the uneasy critic who later denigrated that journal as "sterile." He was concerned with reputation and how to achieve it—how to avoid eclipse. It was lasting fame he had in mind. "I know of no writer in English," he insisted, "who has added a micromillimeter to his stature by 'realizing his Jewishness,' although I know of some who have curtailed their promise by trying to heighten their Jewish consciousness." Trilling wrote these words in 1944, when the German ovens were at full blast and European Jewish consciousness was, in the most literal sense, unrealized. He was then thirty-nine; his stature was already assured. He could not have imagined that he would come to be remembered largely, if not chiefly, as Columbia's stellar Jew. ♦



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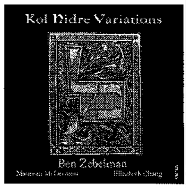

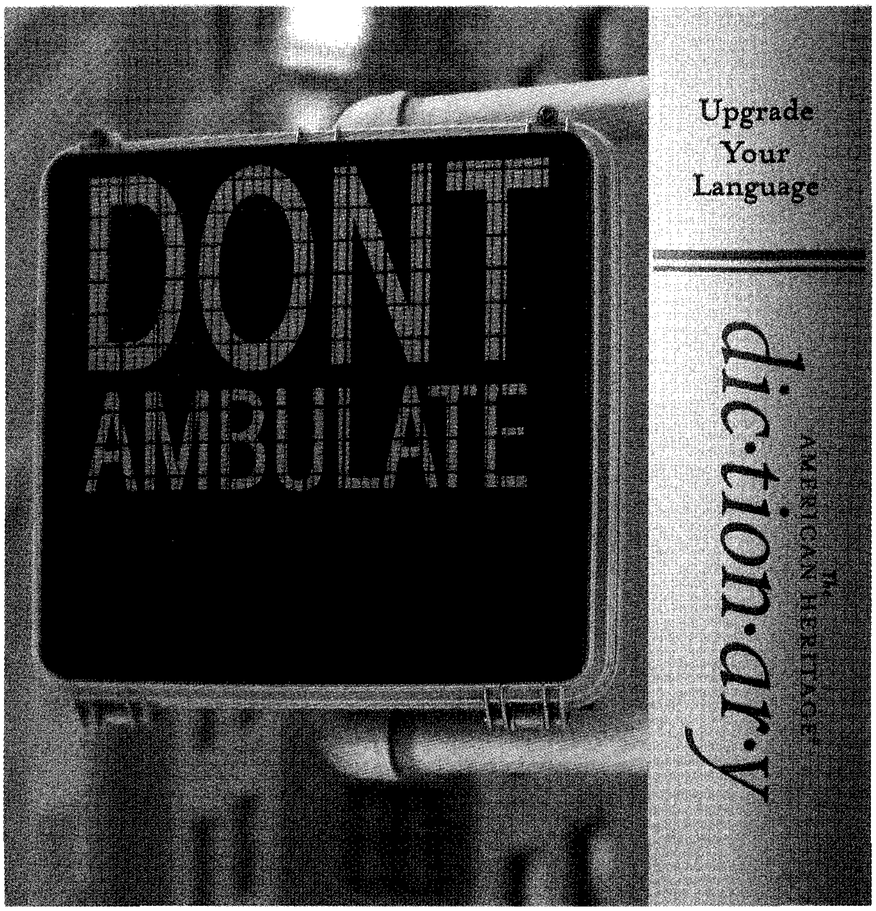

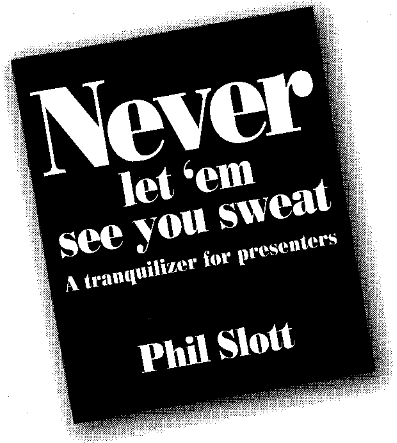

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passing years I have learned to accept the name—to live with it, as we say—and even to be gratified by it. But it always startles me, takes me a little aback. . . .

If I ask myself why this is so, the answer would seem to be that in some sense I did not ever undertake to be a critic. . . . The plan that did please my thought was certainly literary, but what it envisaged was the career of a novelist. To this intention, criticism, when eventually I began to practice it, was always secondary, an afterthought: in short, not a vocation but an avocation.

An astonishing public confession: the years of teaching, the years of writing, the honor and the fame that accrued in its wake—all this no more than an avocation! And the vocation? Buried. The imposing stuff of the Wieseltier anthology, resplendent in its intellect and subtlety and style—and, dare one say, its nobility—may turn out to be not so much a revival as a reminder and a marker: a necessary headstone.

But suppose vocation and avocation had really been transposed, and Trilling had fulfilled his intention, leaving behind a long row of novels—novels of manners, novels of social observation, novels of moderate sentiments, and of the sense of things? In 1976, his longtime Columbia colleague Jacques Barzun, thinking back to the figure that was already fading less than a year after Trilling's death, regretted his friend's "unwarrantably subdued reputation." If there had been more novels, he contended (perhaps he was privy to Trilling's more intimate reflections), "or if he had spoken as a free lance instead of from an academic platform, the response might have been different—not wiser, perhaps, but louder and nearer the mark."

There is no long row of novels: they once existed in Trilling's fantasy; they may dimly glimmer in ours. Still, the essays—a good portion of them—have been restored to visibility by a dedicated editor. In their shoreless precincts one can hear the call, desolate but urgent, of the thinker and the teacher—and never mind that behind the scenes he disowned teaching. Then is it possible, after all, that it is not Lionel Trilling who is buried and lost but rather ourselves, we who relinquish his austere searchings for the sake of academic anger and public trivia? He may have despaired of his students, but not of ideas. What he was after, in the classroom and in the world, tellectuals, by contrast, are singularly chained to the mood and condition of their given decades. Time may turn novels into classics; critical essays it turns into symptomatic documents of an era. In our own era, no one has supplanted Trilling, and it is easy to understand why. The study of literature no longer strives for what Trilling (in language that might invite scoffing) dared to call "moral realism." Criticism of life is not seen to be the business of criticism. The demarcations of high culture have given way to the obliteration of boundaries. The figure has given way to the performer. Today, there is a well-known critic celebrated for aesthetic rhapsody, and countless minor zealots enmeshed in the vines of rivalrous ideologies, from which too many English-department Tarzans swing. But there is no grand cultural explicator and doubter.

"Trilling was a distinguished enemy of his time," Leon Wieseltier affirms in his robust introduction to the essays. "There was never just one thing, in his work: no single lock, no single key. . . . He exemplified the intellectual vocation not least by his impiety about it." His inclination was to "dissent from the orthodoxies of dissent." What Wieseltier's compendium now makes available is the mind of a serious traveller to the most exalted, and often the most problematical, stations of art and ideas and manners. John Dos Passos is here, and Keats and James and Kipling and Joyce and William Dean Howells; also "Wordsworth and the Rabbis," "Art and Neurosis," "The Fate of Pleasure," the Leavis-Snow controversy. It is a mind contemplating the transcendent through the gritty resistances of human vulnerability. And so both Wordsworth and Howells are praised for attention to the ordinary—Wordsworth for "consciousness of the *neighbor*," and Howells for "moderate sentiments" and "the sense of things," typified by six chapters of a novel devoted to a character's search for a suitable apartment. Not that Trilling is content with the appearance of simplicity: Howells's moderate sentiments point to a complexity of earthbound ironies—despite the loftiness of one's will or desire, the gross and the immediate impose themselves. "The kind of critical interest I am asking the literary intellectual to take in the life around him is a proper interest of the literary mind," he stated in 1952, in one of his more roundabout sentences, five years after he had stopped publishing fiction. This was not the bright and malleable sentence of a fiction writer; it was the utterance of a figure. "Art," he ended, with his most Arnoldian gesture, "strange and sad as it may be to have to say it again, really is the criticism of life."

Criticism is the watchword. It is sad, though not strange, that Wieseltier includes no fiction in his ample anthology: not "Of This Time, Of That Place," the most resonant of the short stories, and no excerpt from "The Middle of the Journey." Trilling's narrative vigor was constrained partly by the emotionally pruned-down Hemingway example, but mainly through the absence of that tumultuous and winged strain that animates character and lubricates it and gives it the quiver of being. All the same, Trilling was a novelist. Or, with more novels than one to his name, could have been; and perhaps should have been. He had the psychological equipment for it. His social and historical shrewdness was steeped in experience (Whittaker Chambers was the model for Gifford Maxim of "The Middle of the Journey"), and he had, in his storytelling, a lucidly objective American voice. With a body of work behind him, the novelist he might most have resembled was Howells—of whom Trilling wrote, "We expect of him that he will involve us in the enjoyment of moral activity through the medium of a lively awareness of manners, that he will delight us by touching on high matters in the natural course of gossip." And what is this if not a sketch of Trilling's own novel? Defending Howells, he notes that critics have judged Howells's fiction to be "bloodless"—the very word, bitterly recorded in the notebooks, that had been applied to "The Middle of the Journey."

Four years before his death, Trilling was invited to give a talk at Purdue University. Uncharacteristically, he chose to speak of himself:

> I am always surprised when I hear myself referred to as a critic. After some thirty years of having been called by that name, the role and the function it designates seem odd to me. I do not say alien, I only say odd. With the

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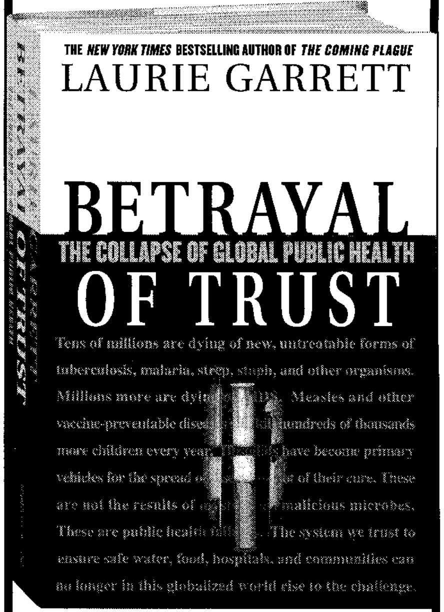
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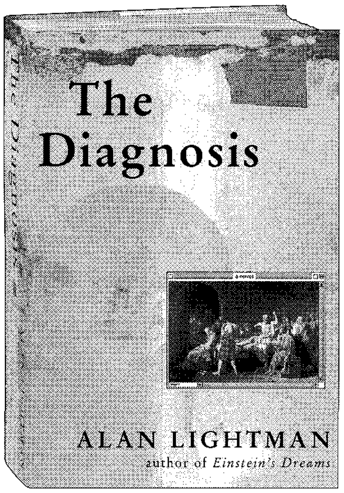

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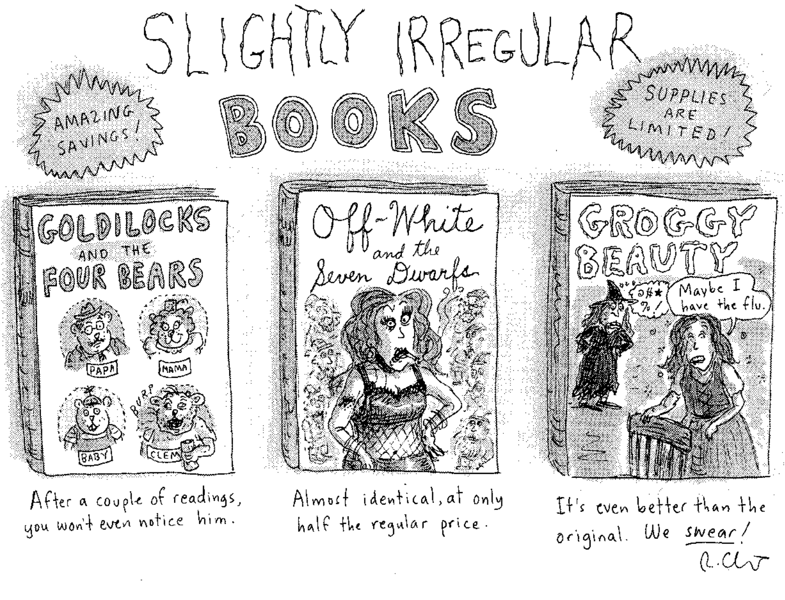
more imbricated, more and more allergic to self-disclosure, he indicted the empty sentimentality of "egalitarian hedonism." Outside the lecture hall, the indictment was muted, and so oblique as to seem equivocal. In 1974, Norman Podhoretz, who headed *Commentary* (where Trilling had long published), faulted his former teacher for his hesitations and charged him with a failure of nerve in the face of "a resurgence of philistinism, very often of simple cultural barbarism." Trilling's response was that he had been overtaken by fatigue. "One's reaction was likely to be a despairing shrug," he said. On the Vietnam issue, he remained unengaged. But hesitation and ambivalence had been in the grain of his literary temperament from the beginning; they lurked in the short stories he wrote in his twenties. Freud's "Civilization and Its Discontents," with its bleak recognitions, was a touchstone. He was attracted to the Keatsian notion of negative capability, that gauzy formula for "remaining content with half-knowledge," "being in uncertainties, mystery, doubts." He preferred ambiguity to resolution. In essay after essay, he alluded to contingency, the conditioned life, the limits of the unavoidable and the unchangeable.

Probably no literary critic of Trilling's standing, with a history of so enduring and authoritative a presence, is in greater eclipse. Edmund Wilson may no longer be widely read, but he survives as a vivid cultural witness, perhaps because of his connection with the clouds of legend that continue to trail Scott Fitzgerald and Hemingway. The patrician Wilson, whom Trilling admired and hoped to emulate, was also among the last of the independent men of letters—a genuine freelance of uncompromised autonomy. Trilling, however, needed the security of a steady job. As a young college instructor, he was for a time supporting both his ailing wife and his impoverished parents; even so, he aspired to Wilson's princely freedom. The prestige he craved, and the lusts of his ambition, were not to be satisfied by a professorship, however elevated his position eventually became. Though he did not have Wilson's elasticity—Trilling might have been incurious about the Iroquois—the mettle of his literary scrutiny, and his excavations into the meaning of culture, surpassed the scope of the academy. He was in it and yet seemed to loom somewhere beyond it. Erudition enriched his thinking, but it was intuition more than learning that pressed his sentences forward from loop to loop. He was an intellectual who wanted to be an artist.

The eclipse of an artist can sometimes be reversed (Melville and Dickinson are the famous American examples); the eclipse of an intellectual, almost never. When a society changes, art trumps time. That Anna Karenina's divorce troubles would not be likely to lead to her suicide in the twenty-first century hardly invalidates the purity of Tolstoy's masterwork. Literary in-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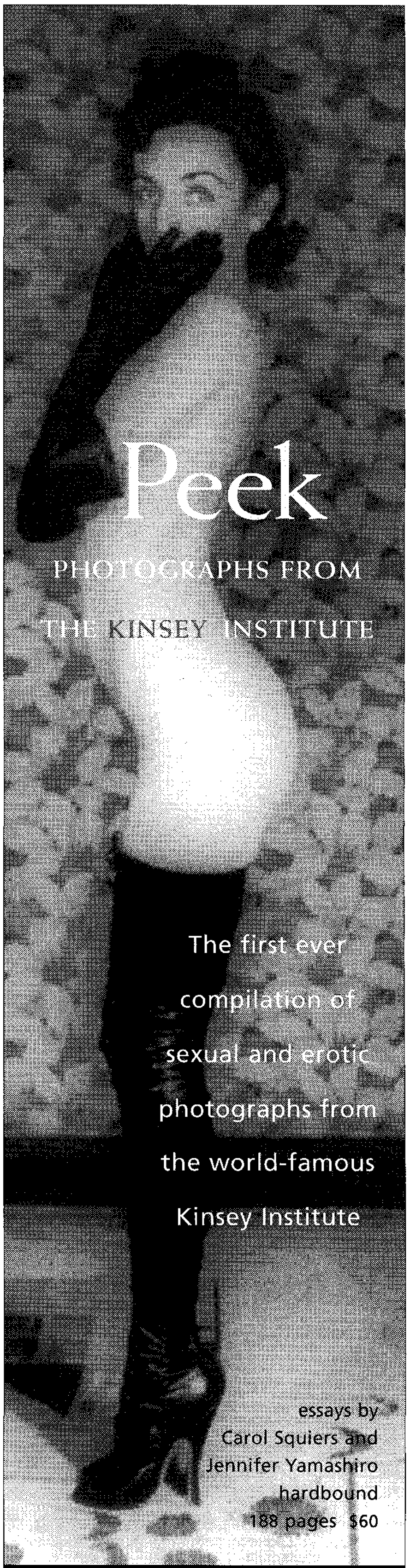
ciations of this kind were widespread among intellectuals in that fermenting period of Depression and the rise of Fascism in Europe. In Chicago, Saul Bellow and Isaac Rosenfeld were in an identical fever of radical world-upheaval. "Politics was everywhere," Rosenfeld recalled, looking back. "One ate and drank it." Trilling was quicker than most to fall away.

But when he advised the liberals of the forties to turn from "agencies, and bureaus, and technicians," and to cultivate instead a "lively sense of contingency and possibility," and when he was troubled by his complacent students of the fifties who glibly accepted antithetical ideas without resistance or perturbation—who were, in fact, bored by the subversive and the antisocial—how could he have foreseen the riotous campus demonstrations of 1968? In connecting politics with literature—"the politics of culture," he called it—he was unwittingly entering the vestibule of the politicization of literature, a commonplace in today's universities. Unwitting or not, Trilling was bemused to see how the impulse of unrestraint that inflamed the modern masters—Conrad, Mann, Lawrence, Kafka, Nietzsche—was beginning to infiltrate, and finally take over, popular thought and style. These writers, he pointed out, with all their relentless counterminings, asked "every question that is forbidden in polite society." By the nineteen-seventies, no question remained that was forbidden in polite society, and no answer, either; there was little left of the concept of polite society altogether. What was liberty for Lawrence became libertinism in the streets. The bold contrariness of the moderns had succeeded so well that Trilling starchily named its dominance in the country at large "the adversary culture." Babbitt and H. L. Mencken's booboisie were routed. Conrad's heart of darkness—the instinctual storm that had once been the esoteric province of modernist high art—had gone public. The Cossacks were astride the politics of culture.

Such were Trilling's ultimate convictions, hidden under the ornate historical scaffolding of "Sincerity and Authenticity," the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures he delivered at Harvard, in 1970. In language grown more and



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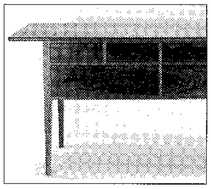

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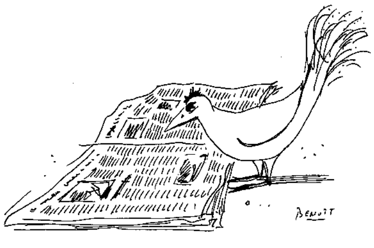
eighty-fifth birthday. Almost no one nowadays comes to literary criticism with these premises and intonations.

"The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent," Leon Wieseltier's newly published collection of thirty-two essays covering thirty-six years of Trilling's output, serves to underscore a salient cultural turnabout. The title alone signals how little of Trilling's intellectual cosmos survives, having been displaced by a perfervid succession of rapidly outmoded theoretical movements: structuralism, deconstruction, cultural studies, gender studies, queer studies, postcolonialism. It is Trilling himself who represents the buried life of American literary culture: the brooding body of his essays, their opalescent crisscross of clauses, the minute waverings of his oscilloscopic mind—above all, his now nearly incomprehensible influence. His name has dimmed. In the graduate schools, his work is mostly unread, and his ideas are undiscussed. His ideas were large and cumulative and, knot by knot, unnerving; rather than zero in on a single aspect of human life and examine it as if it were an entire civilization (a current academic tendency), he did the opposite. He looked at a civilization—usually a past social order—and drew from it a distinguishing trait, which he took pains to set against exigent present need or taste. In pondering the place of "duty" in the Victorian novel, for instance, and more generally in the England of the nineteenth century, he set out to counter the cant of the middle of the twentieth:

> Such figures as the engineer Daniel Doyce of "Little Dorrit" or Dr. Lydgate of "Middlemarch" represent the developing belief that a man's moral life is bound up with his loyalty to the discipline of his calling. . . . The Church, in its dominant form and characteristic virtue, was here quite at one with the tendency of secular feeling; its preoccupation may be said to have been less with the achievement of salvation than with the performance of duty.
>
> The word grates upon our moral ear. We do what we should do, but we shrink from giving it the name of duty. "Cooperation," "social-mindedness," the "sense of the group," "class solidarity"— these locutions do not mean what duty means. They have been invented precisely for the purpose of describing right conduct in such a way as *not* to imply what duty implies—a self whose impulses and desires are very strong, and a willingness to subordinate these impulses and desires to the claim of some external nonpersonal good. The new locutions are meant to suggest that right action is typically to be performed without any pain to the self.
>
> The men of the nineteenth century did not imagine this possibility. They thought that morality was terribly hard to achieve, at the cost of renunciation and sacrifice. We of our time often wonder what could have made the difficulty. . . . That the self may destroy the self by the very energies that define its being, that the self may be preserved by the negation of its own energies—this, whether or not we agree, makes a paradox, makes an irony, that catches our imagination. Much of the nineteenth-century preoccupation with duty was not a love of law for its own sake, but rather a concern with the hygiene of the self.

"The hygiene of the self": the phrase is Trilling distilled. From the tangled English garden of an intricate foreign culture—a culture long gone—he plucked the one telling thorn, the thorn most likely to draw blood from the living.

"Trilling was our last Victorian sage," Mark Krupnick, the author of a book-length consideration of Trilling's career, wrote from the perspective of 1986. It was a judgment designed to suggest not mustiness but something more pressing and expansive: what contemporary critic will speak, directly and repeatedly, as Trilling did, of "the contradictions, paradoxes and dangers of living the moral life"? These stringent words appear in the introduction to Trilling's 1943 study of E. M. Forster, where the term "liberal imagination" first crops up. Some time later, in his rebuke to Stalinism in "The Liberal Imagination," Trilling proposed contradiction and paradox as an antidote to ideology, which he saw as simple, utopian, and authoritarian. "The job of criticism," he insisted, was "to recall liberalism to its first essential imagination of variousness and possibility, which implies the awareness of complexity and difficulty." Trilling himself had been, briefly, an active radical, a member of the Communist-led National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners; he resigned in 1933. Youthful asso-



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youth, that they have more or less consciously assumed a role by excluding some of the once-present elements from themselves. But ever after they are haunted by the fear that they might have selected another, better, role, that perhaps they have made the wrong choice." Even as Trilling was setting down these relentless words, he was howling in his journal their anguished echo: *How far-far-far I am going from being a writer. . . . A few—very few—more years and the last chance will be gone.* Before he was thirty, he was already seeing Arnold as the prophet of his own buried life. The public character he would acquire, his status as a figure, was eloquent, was well; but the Muse who lights the hidden self had gone away.

Since Trilling's death, in 1975, the literary culture he espoused and embodied has itself gone away. English departments today harbor few defenders of literary high seriousness as Trilling conceived it. In an unfinished essay truncated by his final illness—"Why We Read Jane Austen"—Trilling set out to explain "the aim of traditional humanistic education." Its purpose, he said, was to read "about the conduct of other people as presented by a writer highly endowed with moral imagination" and "to see this conduct as relevant to [our] own . . . in that it redeems the individual from moral torpor." He went on to modify and modulate and reconsider, bringing in contradictory examples from history and ethnology, and offering "at least a little complication to humanism's rather simple view of the relation in which our moral lives stand to other cultures"—but the argument against moral torpor held. Twenty years earlier, musing on Jane Austen's "Mansfield Park," he had written, "Never before had the moral life been shown as she shows it to be, never before had it been conceived to be so complex and difficult and exhausting," and, shockingly, he announced, "She is the first to be aware of the Terror which rules our moral situation, the ubiquitous anonymous judgment to which we respond. . . . She herself is an agent of the Terror." He said much the same of Robert Frost, in a notoriously revisionist speech at a dinner honoring Frost's

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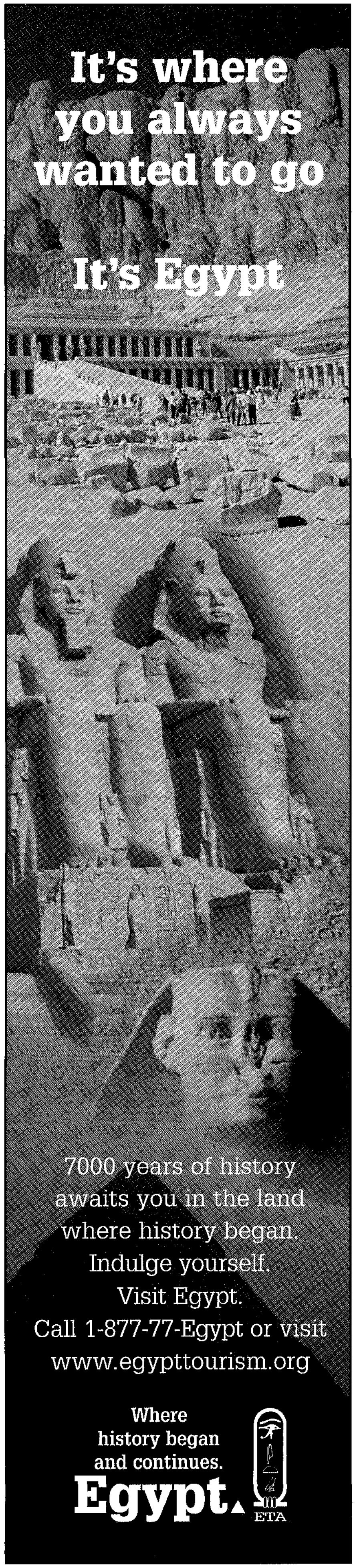
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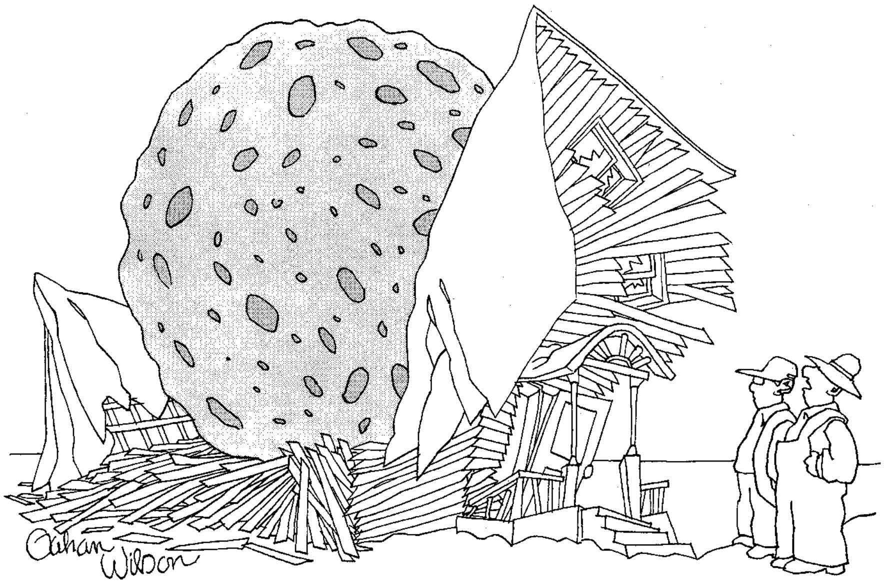

"Hit 'em right after they won the lottery."

any other time in his life. His last labor of fiction was quietly consummated in 1947, when he was forty-two, with the publication of "The Middle of the Journey," his only novel—and from the point of view of the academy, where he seemed so much at home, it came unexpectedly.

Yet, all along, telltale sighs of loss and competitiveness had been turning up in the notebooks: "Story of a university teacher who had never got to write"—an idea for a story that never got written. After a visit from Allen Ginsberg, a former student: "We spoke of Kerouac's book. I predicted that it would not be good & insisted. But later I saw with what bitterness I had made the prediction—not wanting K's book to be good." These are the ruminations not of a teacher or a critic but of a writer of fiction desperate to be in the running. "The attack on my novel," he recorded, "that it is gray, bloodless, intellectual, without passion, is always made with great personal feeling, with anger. — How dared I presume?"

He did not presume again. There were no other novels. By 1945, the stories, and the ideas for stories, had trickled to a stop. That stricken cry of his middle age, mourning the death of Hemingway, was also a lamentation for the death of another novelist—himself.

In Trilling's study of Matthew Arnold—a majestic work begun at twenty-three and submitted as his doctoral dissertation a decade later—he spoke of a "feeling of intimacy" with his subject. The attachment was lifelong. He described Arnold's style as "subtle critical dialectic" and his method as requiring "that we suspend our absolute standards and look at events or ideas, whether past or present, in the light of their historical determinants." These Arnoldian leitmotifs became Trilling's own critical instruments, reflecting the veiled melancholia and austerity of Arnold's famed "high seriousness." But there was something else the young Trilling took from Arnold—a strangely predictive force embedded in a single poem. Twice in the course of his "biography of a mind," as he called it, Trilling quotes phrases—the same phrases—from "The Buried Life," Arnold's dejected stanzas on the diminution of his poetic stream:

And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown on each talent and power,
But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been
ourselves. . . .
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well—but 'tis not true.

"The Muse has gone away," Trilling comments. "Men feel, as they leave

I helped him to write more attractively, with more clarity and rigor both of thought and of expression. His prose had hitherto tended to laxness. Itself not disciplined, it could allow for undisciplined thinking. . . . I was relentless in my editorial address to every word he wrote." If this seems unlikely—and, more than that, injurious—James Trilling's claim (in a polemic in the *American Scholar*) that his father suffered from attention-deficit disorder is still more troubling. Diana Trilling names herself the bestower of style. James Trilling presumes to account for the properties of that style. By insinuating weakness where there was sovereignty, both tend to undermine Trilling's public standing from a private vantage. Inevitably, the malicious dust of a colossus pulled down fills the nostrils.

Trilling's prose was complex and scrupulous. It qualified, weighed, probed; it was the opposite of lax, merging taut lines of thought from disparate starting points. It was a manner that had been moved to fine discriminations ever since, at nineteen, Trilling began to write for the *Menorah Journal*, a Jewish literary and cultural periodical edited by Elliot Cohen (who later founded *Commentary*). Years afterward, Trilling wrote lovingly of Cohen as "the *only* great teacher I have ever had," a man who owned "the unremitting passion of genius." With Cohen's encouragement (and Cohen was himself still in his twenties), Trilling reviewed novels by such contemporary luminaries as Ludwig Lewisohn, Robert Nathan, and Lion Feuchtwanger, poetry by Charles Reznikoff and Louis Untermeyer ("Mr. Untermeyer is not a good poet, American or Jewish"), and translations from the Yiddish. He contributed essays both historical and speculative, ranging from "A Friend of Byron" to "The Changing Myth of the Jew," and though over the decades his style grew more elaborately nuanced, the reach and versatility that defined it was evident from the first. His contemporaries at the magazine included Clifton Fadiman, Lewis Mumford, Charles Beard, and Mark Van Doren—essayists all—but Trilling had a more crucial ambition. The *Menorah Journal* became the depository of his earliest stories; he wrote more short fiction now than at

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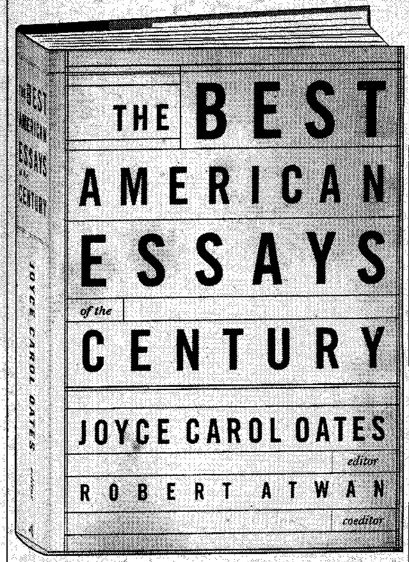

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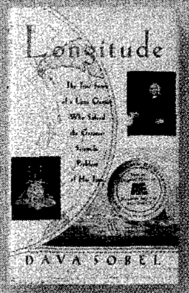

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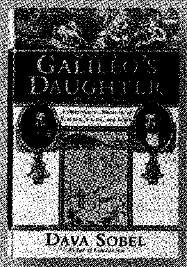

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he writes; the tone is a public one of self-knowledge and confidence. Yet in July of that same year Trilling was privately regretting what he had made of his life, and grieving that he was not someone else:

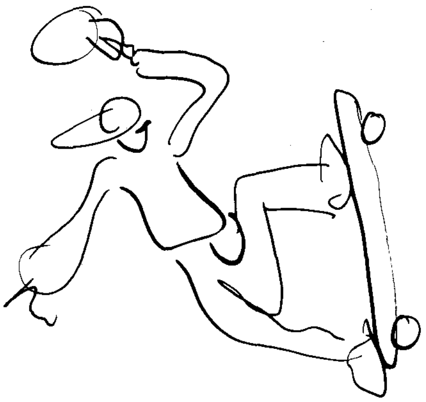
> —Death of Ernest Hemingway . . . who would suppose how much he has haunted me? How much he existed in my mind—as a reproach? He was the only writer of our time I envied. I respected him in his most foolish postures and in his worst work.

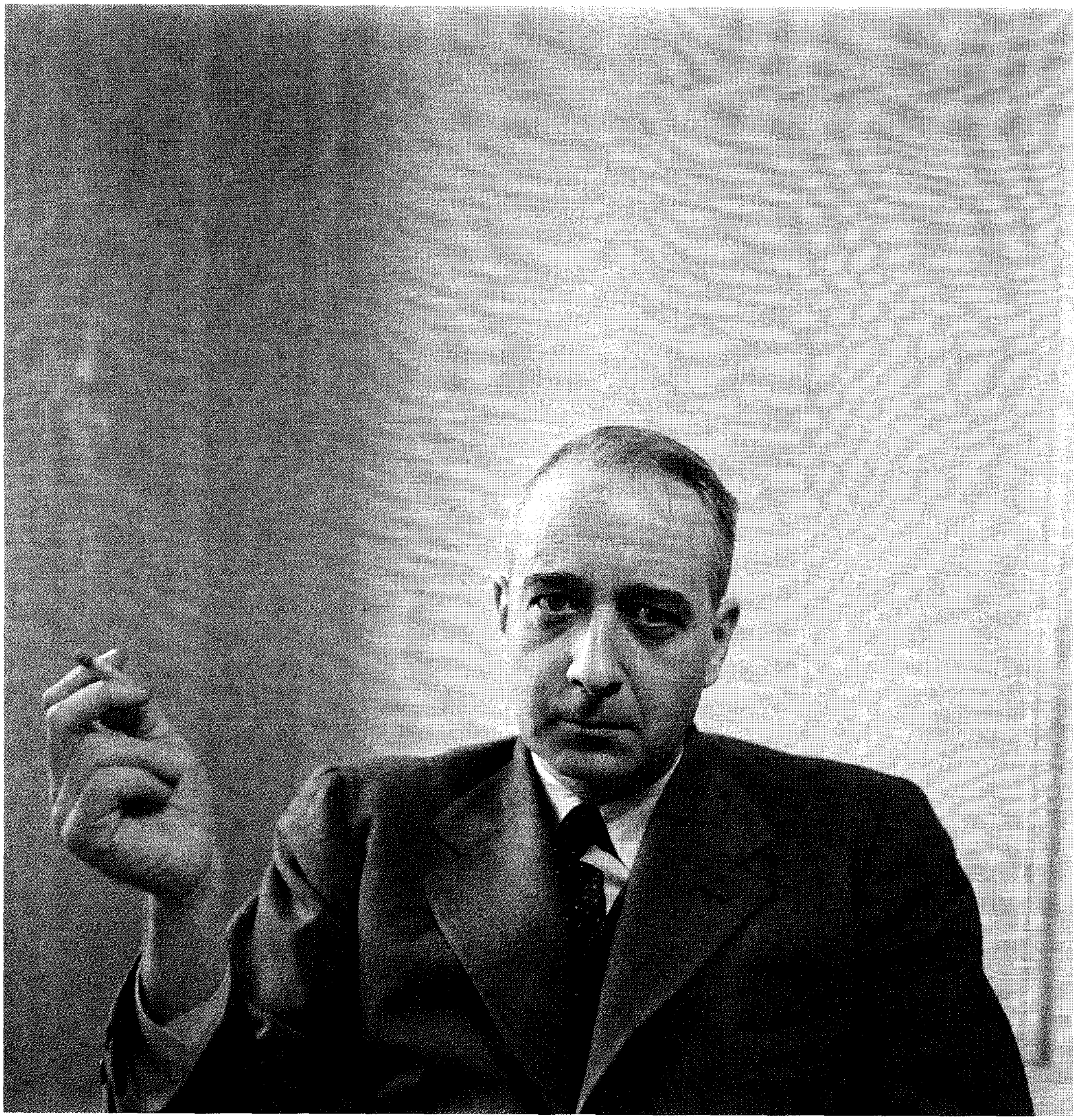
Haunted by Hemingway? Envy? Reproach? Trilling was fifty-six when he sequestered these emotions in his notebooks. But in 1933, at twenty-eight, his Columbia position still provisional and no permanent appointment in sight, he was reproaching himself still more vehemently.

> Saw a letter Hemingway wrote to Kip [Clifton Fadiman]—a crazy letter, written when he was drunk—self-revealing, arrogant, scared, trivial, absurd: yet felt from reading it how right such a man is compared to the "good minds" of my university life—how he will produce and mean something to the world . . . how his life which he could expose without dignity and which is anarchic and "childish" is a better life than anyone I know could live, and right for his job. And how far-far-far I am going from being a writer—how less and less I have the material and the mind and the will. A few—very few—more years and the last chance will be gone.

The surprisingly incongruous attraction to Hemingway, the envy, the reproach, the regret, the dark intimations of something irretrievable: none of this moodiness was visible in the public character. That Trilling—the incarnation of dignity, discipline, moderation—should look wistfully to the heedlessness and anarchy he saw in Hemingway is on the face of it unimaginable. In the corpus of Trilling's essays, this underground desire to shed or oppose civilization can be glimpsed only once or twice, and then mainly through peepholes in the prose. Writing of the stories in Isaac Babel's "Red Cavalry" (a Jew riding with the Red Army's Cossacks), Trilling exposed the skeleton of his internal antithesis: "The Jew conceived his own ideal character to consist in his being intellectual, pacific, humane. The Cossack was physical, violent, without mind or manners." By inheritance and temperament, Trilling was the first. He understood the writer (by which he meant the novelist) to be a type radically different from himself: instinctual, a reckless darer, a hero. Paraphrasing Henry James, he agreed that "the artist quite as much as any man of action carries his ultimate commitment and his death warrant in his pocket." As a teacher of literature, as the kind of honored public character he had become, he was immured in the intellectual, the pacific, the humane; there was no risk, no death warrant, in the reflective life of the literary essayist. Musing harshly on his Columbia colleagues, he deplored "such people as Mark VD [Van Doren], who yearly seems to me to grow weaker & weaker, more academic, less a person." As for Trilling himself: "My being a professor and a much respected and even admired one is a great hoax. . . . Suppose I were to dare to believe that one could be a professor and a man! and a writer!" Here was bitterness, here was regret: he did not believe that a professor could be truly a man; only the writer, with his ultimate commitment to the wilderness of the imagination, was truly a man.

In approaching such ironies—Trilling as self-repudiator, Trilling as failed writer—one ought to be warned. Journal entries, those vessels of discontent, are notoriously fickle, subject to the torque of mutable feeling; without caution, speculation falls into usurpation. Though the living Trilling was valued and acclaimed, the dead Trilling has been made into a puppet, violated by at least two memoirists: his wife and his son. Diana Trilling, in her 1993 account of their marriage, insisted that she taught him how to write. "He had been writing and publishing for some years before we met," she admitted, "but



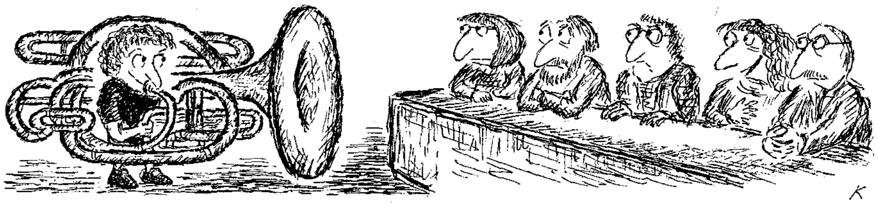


“Suppose I were to dare to believe that one could be a professor and a man! and a writer!” Lionel Trilling brooded in his notebook.

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART/WALKER EVANS ARCHIVE

me with shame and regret at what I have not done.” A hollow introspection, secretly whispered while standing in the very palm of literary fame. (“I hear on all sides,” he had written some years earlier, “of the extent of my reputation—which some even call ‘fame.’. . . It is the thing I have most wanted from childhood on—although of course in much greater degree.”) By 1962, Trilling had published a major work on Matthew Arnold, a vanguard study of E. M. Forster, and some fifty consummately original essays collected in three highly influential volumes. He had also written a novel. He was, by any standard, a “figure,” and by his own standard especially. Assessing George Orwell—“He is not merely a writer, he is a figure”—he attached this term to those who “*are* what they write, whom we think of as standing for something as men because of what they have written in their books. They preside, as it were, over certain ideas and attitudes.”

Trilling’s ideas, particularly his political ideas, evolved from decade to decade, but his attitudes remained consistent. He stood for—he presided over—a disposition toward the claims of morality. “My own interests,” he said in a 1961 essay on teaching, “lead me to see literary situations as cultural situations, and cultural situations as great elaborate fights about moral issues, and moral issues as having something to do with gratuitously chosen images of personal being, and images of personal being as having something to do with literary style.” This was unmistakably the portrait of a figure, the man who is what



A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE BURIED LIFE

Lionel Trilling was the greatest critic of his day. It was his lifelong regret.

BY CYNTHIA OZICK

Half a century ago, Lionel Trilling summoned me to his office at Columbia University to be interviewed for admission to his renowned graduate seminar. For ten minutes or so, I sat fixed under his gray prosecutorial eye; he seemed gray all over—his suit, his tie, the level line of his hair, his nostrils with their monarchical arches. His manner was reticent, hiddenly mocking, almost inviolable. I saw him as a kind of monument, and I hoped for access to his seminar less for the sake of what I would study there than for proximity to his fame. It was the Age of Criticism—the marmoreal tag given to it by Randall Jarrell, one of its poet-critics—and Trilling was its most eminent literary intellectual. "The Liberal Imagination," his landmark work, had appeared only the year before, in 1950; it had catapulted an already vigorous reputation into something hierarchical: rank, influence, authority.

From the nineteen-forties on, the Age of Criticism had been especially fruitful, and had multiplied so many literary exegetes and ruminators that, with all their differences, they had come to constitute an establishment. They might call themselves Southern Agrarians, like Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, or neo-Thomists, like Eliseo Vivas, or formalists, like Cleanth Brooks—but, whatever the rubric and whatever the tendency, the mantle of New Criticism fell over all of them. Nowadays, the jingling mantra of their illustrious names is a faded archaism, together with their monastic tenets. The chief dogma of New Criticism, irresistible and indisputable, was *explication de texte*, or close reading, which meant the exclusion of all external interpretive biases: no politics, no past, no social forms, no ethics. Instead, the isolated purity of metaphor, image, "tension," irony—elements that were said to be objectively inherent in the work, which was looked on as a self-enclosed artifact. In the most up-to-date graduate schools of the time (I was fresh from one of these), all this was felt not as a literary movement but as a theology linked to eternity. It was with such a credo—New Criticism as sacrosanct truth—that I arrived at Trilling's office door.

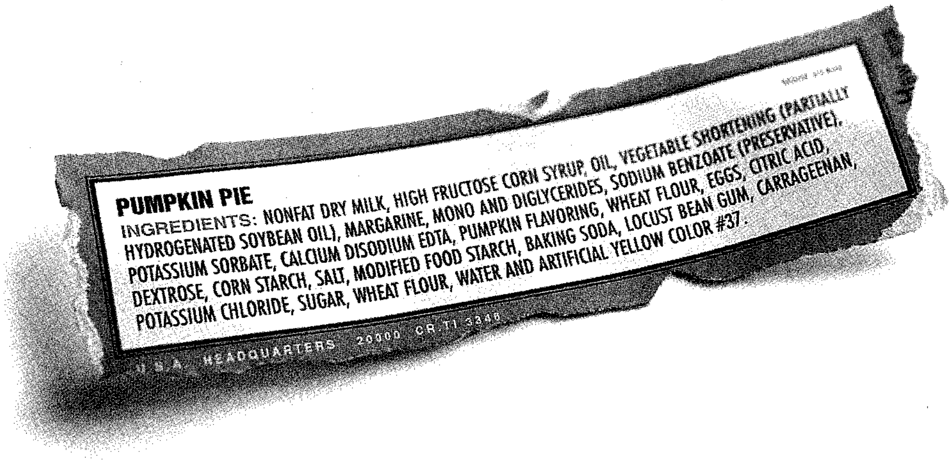
His ridicule, courteous and restrained, was direct enough. "You don't really believe," he said—it was accusation rather than question—"that literature has nothing to do with psychology, with biography or society or history?" I did believe it; I had been trained to believe it. Who of my generation was not susceptible to that aesthetic casuistry? But it was instantly plain that to admit adherence to New Critical precepts would shut me out from the seminar; so, just as instantly, I switched allegiance to the other side, though five minutes before I had scarcely known that there was another side. It was the seminar I coveted—not the substance of the seminar (Victorian social theorists) but some unfathomable emanation of the mind that presided over it.

The seminar turned out to be a disappointment. In one respect, it confirmed everything Trilling had heralded in those electrifying ten minutes in his office: it was saturated in social and historical issues. New Criticism had no status here and was altogether shunned; after all, Trilling in "The Liberal Imagination" had assailed what he called the New Critics' pervasive "anxiety lest the work of art be other than totally self-contained." In this self-contained room of ambitious young scholars—headed almost universally for academic careers—there were more personal anxieties. Trilling was disconsolate and irritable. He was impatient; often he seemed fatigued. He had one or two favorites, whom he would praise profusely—but he was sarcastic or indifferent to others. If a comment struck him as inadequate, his lanternlike eyes would silence the speaker with barely disguised dismissal; his gray back was a wall of contempt, of wishing to be elsewhere.

Trilling did wish to be elsewhere, and had already taken steps to effect his escape. While the semester was running its course, and I sat cowed and bewildered by fame's unexpected face, he was setting down in his private notebooks an account of his disgust for the seminar and his relief at his coming release from it. The seminar, he wrote,

> needs a total intellectual & emotional involvement that I shld never want to make.... And then the students dismay me.... But then all graduate students trouble & in a way repel me and I must put down here the sensation of liberation I experienced when I arranged for my withdrawal from the graduate school, from seminars.... For one thing I became a public character and always on view, having to live up to the demands made upon a public character, & finding that the role seemed to grow inward.... And here I should set down my ever-growing dislike of teaching & of the systematic study of literature—more and more it goes against the grain.

These extraordinary thoughts were recorded in 1951. Trilling would continue to teach for the next quarter century, until his death in 1975, and his position as "public character" would grow in prominence and distinction. But in 1962, after confessing his admiration for a memoir by Sartre, he was lamenting (again in the seclusion of his notebooks), "Nothing has so filled



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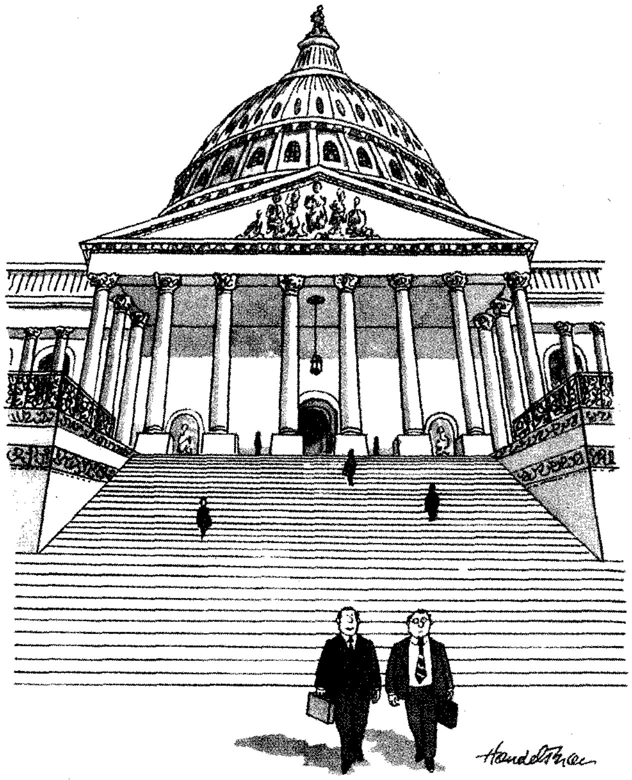
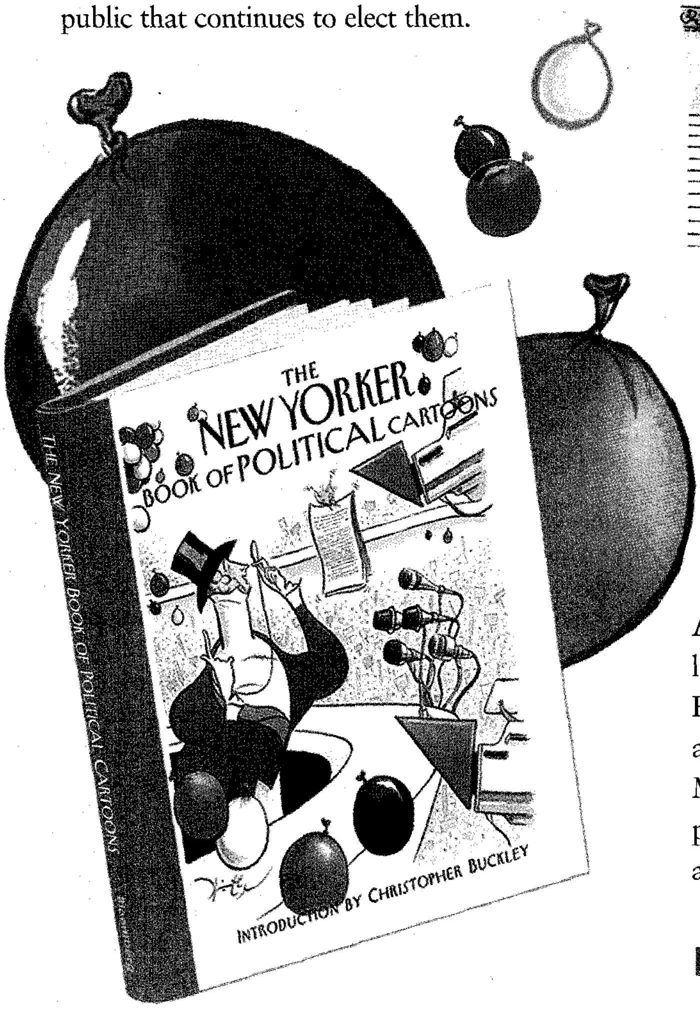


"YOU'VE BEEN AROUND HERE LONGER THAN I HAVE. WHAT ARE 'CONGRESSIONAL ETHICS'?"


THE NEW YORKER BOOK OF POLITICAL CARTOONS
INTRODUCTION BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY
THE NEW YORKER BOOK OF POLITICAL CARTOONS

A dream team of cartoonists—including the likes of Lee Lorenz, William Hamilton, Roz Chast, Edward Koren, Charles Barsotti, George Booth, and *The New Yorker* cartoon editor, Robert Mankoff himself—capture the essence of our political life. And Christopher Buckley provides an introduction in his own inimitable style.

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sented as a troublemaker or a criminal, with my parents' names, my date of birth, and a list of my books. Only my distinguishing features were not mentioned. At first I laughed (especially as the whole board was full of mistakes), but then I thought that this kind of poster does us no good. I fear that it will attract attention. For two years, I have not been to the theatre or gone to restaurants; I avoid walking around the city center—and now here is my name in all the bookshops!

1943

January 4th. Beginning today, Jews will get not fifty but a hundred fewer grams of bread than Christians.

Rebreanu [the director of the National Theatre] is preparing Shylock for the National. Camil Petrescu, who reported the conversation to me this evening, asked him whether the passage in which Shylock rebels against anti-Semitic hatred (Are we, too, not human? If you prick us, do we not bleed?) would not be difficult to act in today's conditions.

"No, it won't," Rebreanu replied, "because we'll give it an anti-Semitic interpretation."

January 12th. The night of Thursday to Friday was the kind of feverish night that usually follows my first vision of a book or play. The plan was simple: to make the scenario tend toward farce; to eliminate elements of poetry, delicacy, subtlety, etc. I would ask Nicusor for fifty thousand and we'd get straight down to work, so that rehearsals could begin at once.

October 11th. Saturday was Yom Kippur. I fasted, and I went to the synagogue in the evening to hear the sound of the shofar. Reading over someone's shoulder, I tried to intone the Avinu Malkenu.

Why? Do I believe? Do I want to believe?

No, not even that. But it is as if, in all these unthinking gestures, there is a need for warmth and peace.

October 22nd. [The mathematician] Onicescu (so Devechi tells me) has made up his mind to commit suicide if Germany loses the war. He cannot resign himself to living in a Europe occupied by the descendants of Australian convicts and American emigrants, come back to destroy Western culture. He cannot accept the annihilation of culture.

I asked Devechi [a journalist] to tell him on my behalf (I'd gladly tell him myself if I met him) that if culture is the issue at stake he missed the right moment to commit suicide.

December 8th. A grave letter from Poldy, who is very ill and needs to have two operations. He was in a concentration camp for three months in 1941 and came out with his health ruined.

"*J'ai eu faim, horriblement faim,*" he tells me. And I knew nothing of it. I still know nothing.

December 14th. Today the manuscript was delivered to the theatre. A quarter of an hour later, Soare [a theatre producer] (already introduced to the plot) presented the play on behalf of a teacher who wants to remain anonymous.

Everyone is intrigued, and happy about it. The first rehearsal will take place tomorrow. If this venture makes some money, the rest is unimportant.

1944

April 8th. Four days after the bombing, the city is still in the grip of madness. Everyone is fleeing, or wants to flee.

From the railway station to Bulevardul Basarab, not a single house was untouched. It is a harrowing sight. On one street corner, a group of three women, pulling their hair and tearing their clothes, let out piercing wails over a carbonized corpse that had just been taken from the debris.

Leni's house is completely wrecked. Mary, the young manicurist who used to come every Friday morning, was killed. She was so young, so sweet, so honest. When, among the thousands of anonymous dead, you come across a face you know, a smile you have seen before, death becomes terribly concrete.

August 29th. How shall I begin? Where shall I begin?

The Russians are in Bucharest.

Paris is free.

Our house on Strada Antim has been destroyed by bombs.

It was all quite extraordinary—and then horrifying. All over the city, people shouted with delight. Antonescu had been overthrown in five minutes, the new government formed, and the armistice accepted. We hadn't had time to drink a glass of champagne to Paris (now back in French hands) when the true avalanche of events reached us.

In the morning, the sirens began to wail: the Germans had launched a bombing attack on the city, which kept us in our shelters for sixty hours. And at the last hour, toward Saturday evening, our house was hit. But we are alive.

How afraid we were on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday that the Germans might return to Bucharest, if only for an hour! A single hour would have been all they needed to exterminate us. Each one of us. No one would have escaped.

September 16th. I am not willing to be disappointed.

I always knew deep down that I'd happily have died to bring Germany's collapse a fraction of an inch closer. Germany has collapsed—and I am alive. What more can I ask? So many have died without seeing the beast perish with their own eyes! We who remain alive have had that immense good fortune.

And now? I don't know.

And now life begins. A kind of life which has to be lived. There is a frightening spirit of conformism, new in its orientation but old in its psychological structure.

But, over and above everything, there is the one redeeming truth: the Germans are done for.

December 31st. I returned half an hour ago from the mountains. A clear white light gave depth to the wintry landscape.

I must be getting very old. I didn't find my usual exuberance in the mountains. I was melancholic, almost despondent. Everywhere I go I carry my incurable loneliness around with me.

The last day of the year. I am ashamed to be sad. After all, it is the year that gave me back my freedom. Beyond all the bitterness and suffering, beyond all the disappointments, this one basic fact remains. I think of Poldy and feel bad that he is so far away. I can't wait to see him again. Everything else melts into regrets and hopes.

On May 29, 1945, in Bucharest, Mihail Sebastian was hit by a truck and killed. ♦

few seconds Eugène turned pale and stood up.

"I can't take it! I can't!"

He said this with a kind of physical desperation. Then he ran off. I felt I could have hugged him.

October 13th. The Bukovina Jews have been taken from various localities and sent off to an unknown destination. To Transnistria, some say. God knows what awaits us, too, this winter.

October 18th. Many short dreams last night.

I am with Zoe. She has decided to marry me, and I don't have the courage to refuse—which in the dream gives me great pangs of conscience. The funny thing is that she made up her mind because she thought I was suffering too much, even fasting for her sake—whereas, in reality, I had been fasting for Yom Kippur. We go together to the registry officer, who is a friend of mine. I say that I want him to marry us. Someone congratulates Mama. I am very unhappy at the whole event. I think that we won't be able to make our trip to Italy. On the other hand, I think that my telephone will be reconnected if I marry her.

October 20th. The roads in Bessarabia and Bukovina are filled with corpses of Jews driven from their homes toward Ukraine. Old and sick people, children, women—all indiscriminately pushed onto the roads and driven toward Mogilev. What will they do there? How will they eat? Where will they find shelter? Death by shooting is a much gentler fate.

It is an anti-Semitic delirium that nothing can stop. The number of Jews murdered since June is more than a hundred thousand (according to Gaston Antony).

"Leave!" Rosetti [a publisher] advised me yesterday.

It was more than a piece of advice. What he outlined was a definite plan. But everything is immeasurably difficult, beginning with the first steps of obtaining a passport, a Turkish visa, a Bulgarian visa—not to speak of money. Above all else, there is my own doubt. Do I have the right to leave Mama and Benu alone? On the other hand, is it not madness to wait—helpless and falling apart—to be killed?

October 21st. All Jews are obliged, under a law that appeared in this evening's papers, to deliver items of personal clothing to the state. The required quantity is laid down for each of seven categories: from those without any income to those with an annual income of five hundred thousand lei. It would be hard to copy the whole text, which in terms of anti-Semitism is perhaps the wildest and most unexpected thing I have read up to now. A Jewish person who earns ten thousand lei a month is obliged to donate four shirts, ten pairs of underpants, four pairs of socks, four handkerchiefs, four towels, four flannels, three suits, two pairs of ankle boots, two hats, two overcoats, two linen blankets, two undersheets, two pillow covers, two pillowcases, two sheets. The amounts demanded of the highest income bracket are beyond belief: thirty-six shirts, twelve suits, twelve overcoats, and so on. It is so grotesque that I'm not sure it isn't a sick joke.

December 17th. A new census will begin of all inhabitants "of Jewish blood." "Go over to Catholicism! The Pope's the only one who can still save you!" For several days I have been hearing this same refrain. Somewhere on an island with sun and shade, in the midst of peace, security, and happiness, I would in the end be indifferent to whether I was or was not Jewish. But here and now I cannot be anything else. Nor do I think I want to be.

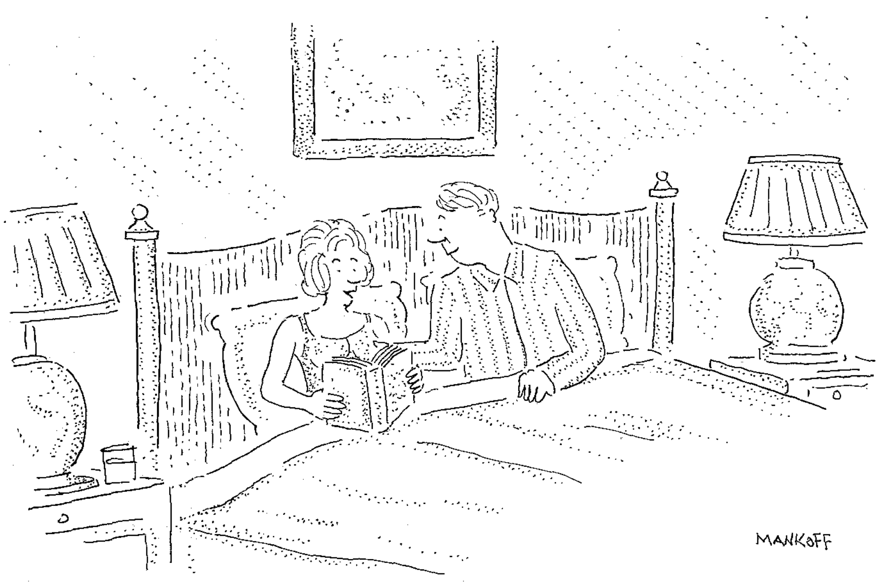
1942

January 3rd. Nicusor Constantinescu (whom I saw yesterday evening at Leni's) has suggested that I write a play. He is prepared to put his name on it, to offer to have it performed by a theatre. The author's share would be paid to me, and after the war the truth would be told. It is a moving gesture; I wonder whether I would be capable of it myself in such a situation. I want to use the opportunity he has offered me. It is a way of earning a few tens of thousands of lei, maybe even more. All day I have thought of nothing else. I must write a play fast. Fast! Will I be up to it?

April 12th. Nothing new at the fronts. Leni readily tells me of the affairs she had three or four years ago—affairs for which I would have felt like killing her if I'd known at the time, but which now leave me cold.

September 16th. Last night, in various districts, Jewish families were picked up and taken away. I don't know how many or why. But from now on none of us can be sure when we go to bed at home that we will still be there the next morning.

November 5th. The Ministry of Propaganda has ordered the removal of books by Jewish writers from libraries and bookshops. Today, at Hachette, I saw two printed boards with huge letters: "Jewish Writers." There, too, of course, I was pre-



"Hold that thought—I've just got two chapters to go."

August 4th. Early this morning, sergeants and policemen went from house to house in various parts of town—and woke people to inform them that Jews aged thirty-six to fifty must report to police headquarters. The alarm I felt at first is returning. Are we facing a mass roundup of Jews? Internment camps? Extermination? When I went out at ten, the city had a strange air: a strange kind of nervous animation. Agitated groups of people hurrying around, with the mute despair that has become a kind of Jewish greeting. Shops were taken over by Jews buying all kinds of things for their departure. The price of the simplest things suddenly shot up. I went to Calea Vacaresti to buy a couple of canvas hats for Benu [Sebastian's younger brother] and myself, and the labels with yesterday's price (a hundred and sixty lei) had been covered over with the new price (two hundred and fifty lei) in ink that was not yet dry.

Meanwhile, nobody knows what to do. To report? Not to report? As for ourselves, we have decided to wait.

August 5th. We didn't report today either, and I don't yet know whether we will tomorrow. There seems to be a conflict of authority between the recruitment office and the police, and this may explain the fact that no coercive measures have yet been taken. It is impossible to get certificates from the doctors who treated my food poisoning. Dr. Kahane advised me to eat contraindicated food so as to bring things to a crisis: only then will the commission believe I am really sick. And this evening I did begin methodical eating of Sibiu salami. Tomorrow I'll drink black coffee. Then we'll see....

Visoianu [a politician] (who is no sentimentalist) said, "Whenever I see a Jew, I feel an urge to go up and greet him and to say, 'Please believe me, sir, I have nothing to do with all this.' "

Everyone disapproves and feels indignant—but at the same time everyone is a cog in the huge anti-Semitic factory that is the Romanian state. Whether or not people are staggered or disgusted, they and tens of thousands like them sign, endorse, and acquiesce, not only tacitly or passively but through direct participation. The bloodying and the mocking of Jews have been public entertainment par excellence.

September 5th. This morning, the community was informed that beginning Wednesday we will have to wear a piece of material with the "six-cornered star" stitched to the top left of our coats. I feel like dropping everything and saying, "Shoot, kill us, put an end to it." But, of course, it is not with that kind of despair, and anyway not with that kind of surrender, that the Jews have survived down the ages.

September 12th. Today they disconnected my telephone, after leaving it on (probably by mistake) for two months. "If Mr. Sebastian is Jewish, the telephone will be cut off," someone phoning from the company told Mama. Two hours later it was all over.

September 25th. The landlord wants ninety-three thousand lei to renew the lease. I'll accept, of course, because it is impossible to move now.

September 27th. I live, as always, in a mindless series of dreams, passing from one to the other, incapable of waking up to reality. I see myself in Geneva with a million Swiss francs (or sometimes only three hundred thousand or a hundred thousand or even thirty thousand). I see myself in London, as an editor at the BBC for forty pounds a month, or working all day at the British Museum and spending misty holidays somewhere by the sea. I see myself at the Russian front, as the special correspondent for an American or a London newspaper. I see myself in New York, and then—weary of all the noise—in a quiet provincial town, where I write smash-hit plays for Broadway without feeling curious enough to go and see them. I stay alone at home, with a gramophone and hundreds of records of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. I see myself with Nadia in New York or California, but I have some problems because I don't get on too well with her parents.

Meanwhile, life is closing in and crushing me. Where will I get money? What will I give Mama for the market on Monday or Tuesday, when the last two thousand left after the rent has been used up? When I don't think of killing myself, I think of begging.

October 3rd. Hitler spoke this afternoon. I was with Eugène [Ionesco] around six o'clock, just when the speech was being broadcast. We went to the Buturuga (where there is a radio) and sat down at a table. I wanted to listen—but after a

"Do these shoes taste funny to you?"

"The flight time today is five hours in first class and twelve and a half in coach."

• •

ing, "We want a Legionary government!"

It seems that police headquarters had been occupied by Legionaries and was now under Army siege. General Antonescu has issued an appeal to the country: "Order will be restored in twenty-four hours!"

January 24th. Yesterday at about 11 A.M., a procession started along Calea Victoriei and on toward the Sosea—long, motorized German columns, with rifles and machine guns at the ready. They certainly made an impression. And it was crystal clear that the German Army was on the side of General Antonescu against the insurgent Legion.

Yesterday morning, candles were burning opposite our building at the corner by the Thoiss pharmacy, where one of the soldiers fell. Passersby stopped and asked about him. In the middle of five or six passersby, I glimpsed the poor madman who once used to wander with a switch and whistle from one streetcar to the next, giving imaginary signals for it to stop or start. Well, that stuttering half-wit was telling how "a yid woman fired with a revolver last night, from the roof of that building over there—and a trooper was hit."

"A yid woman, you say?" asked an elderly gentleman, quite well dressed, quite unruffled.

"Yeah, one o' them yid bitches!"

"And didn't they do anything to her?"

"You bet they did. They arrested her, took her away."

I looked closely at the people listening. Not one had the least doubt about the truth of this absurd story. Did they not know that the soldier fell yesterday in a real street battle, in which hundreds of bullets were fired? But what was the point of asking? Who would have listened? Isn't it easier and quicker to believe what others tell you? "A yid woman opened fire."

That's how a pogrom begins.

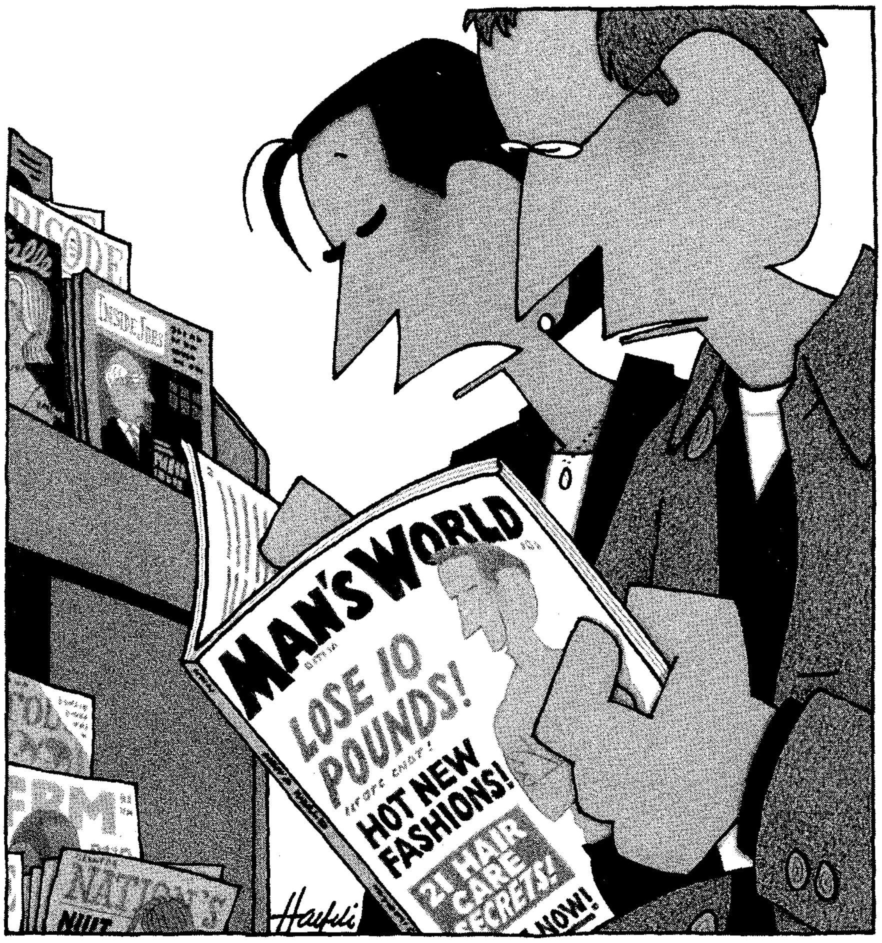
February 4th. I cannot (and would not wish to) forget the horrors through which I have lived. For the last few days, all I have read are the chapters in Dubnov's "History of the Jews" about the great pogroms of the late Middle Ages. Whether the official figure is correct (three hundred Jews killed) or the much higher one that people mention in whispers (six hundred to a thousand), the fact is that we have experienced one of the worst pogroms in history.

The stunning thing about the Bucharest bloodbath is the quite bestial ferocity of it, apparent even in the dry official statement that ninety-three persons ("person" being the latest euphemism for Jew) were killed on the night of Tuesday the twenty-first in Jilava Forest. But what people say is much more devastating. It is now considered absolutely certain that the Jews butchered at Straulesti abattoir were hung by the neck on hooks normally used for beef carcasses. A sheet of paper was stuck to each corpse: "Kosher Meat." As for those killed in Jilava Forest, they were first undressed (it would have been a pity for clothes to remain there), then shot and thrown on top of one another. I haven't found anything more terrible in Dubnov.

February 10th. Eugène Ionesco, who doesn't take long to get drunk, suddenly started talking to me about his mother after a few cocktails on Saturday morning. (Although I heard some time ago that she had been Jewish, the issue had always been closed between us.) Yes, she had been Jewish, from Craiova; her husband left her with two little children in France; she remained a Jew until her death, when he—Eugène—baptized her with his own hand. Then he went on to speak about all the "Jews" who are not known to be such. He mentioned them with a certain spite, as if he wanted to avenge himself on them. Poor Eugène Ionesco! I would have liked to say how fond I was growing of him—but he was too drunk for me to start being sentimental.

March 28th. All the morning papers give banner headlines to the expropriation of the Jews. The rest of the news (the war, the victories in Africa, the coup in Belgrade) is pushed to the back. What is important in Romania today, on Friday, March 28, 1941, is that the Jews have had their homes taken away from them. Camil Petrescu complains that he probably won't even get one of the houses taken from Jews.

"They never give me anything," he said, disheartened. Not only did he see no reason not to take possession of a house that had been taken from a Jew; he actually expected to be given such a house, and would be disappointed if this did not happen.


MAN'S WORLD
LOSE 10 POUNDS!
HOT NEW FASHIONS!
21 HAIR CARE SECRETS!
NOW!
NATION'S
NUIT
Haefeli

"When did men become women?"

• •

called up in the event of a general mobilization. But for now the fact is that I remain at liberty. Never has a "for now" been more precarious and more treasured.

September 20th. Titel Comarnescu tells me of a political conversation he had recently with Mircea, who is more pro-German than ever, more anti-French and anti-Semitic.

"The Poles' resistance in Warsaw," says Mircea, "is a Jewish resistance. Only yids are capable of the blackmail of putting women and children in the front line, to take advantage of the Germans' sense of scruple. Rather than a Romania again invaded by kikes, it would be better to have a German protectorate."

Now I understand perfectly why he is so reticent with me when it is a question of politics, and why he appears to take refuge in metaphysics to escape "the horrors of politics."

Just look at what he thinks, your ex-friend Mircea Eliade.

1940

January 9th. Today at the adjutant's office, Ghita Ionescu told me that the call-up on January 15th will be especially for Jews. There will be fifteen hundred Jews and not one Christian.

"I don't understand why," he said. "I suppose it's O.K. in time of war. You can form special units of Jews and send them to be mowed down at the front. But what sense does it make now?"

I left there depressed. Everything is bearable until you start feeling acted on not as a soldier, not as a citizen, but as a Jew.

June 16th. On the Eiffel Tower, the swastika. At Versailles, German sentries.

There will be newspapers, declarations, and political parties that present Hitler as a friend and sincere protector of France. When that time comes, all the panic and all the resentments will find release in one long pogrom.

Where can Poldy be? What will he do? What will become of him? And what of us here?

1941

January 1st. Since the fall of Paris, last June, when I decided not to write any longer (I felt disgust and, above all, a terrible sense of futility), I have tried only once, last October, to start keeping a journal again, but I did not have sufficient perseverance.

In the end, there is something artificial in the very fact of keeping a private diary; nowhere does the act of writing seem more false. I remember that in Paris with Poldy we never spoke French when we were alone, though we would have liked to do so for the sake of practice. It seemed to us unnatural, pretentious. There is some of the same embarrassment in writing "for myself." For if writing does not help me communicate with someone it begins to seem—at least initially—absurd and lacking in personal depth.

Nevertheless, I regretted so many times not having the stoutness of heart to continue my journal over the last half year.

Happy New Year! Perhaps it won't be "happy": we shouldn't ask too much.

January 2nd. This morning I met Cioran in the street. He was glowing. He has been appointed cultural attaché in Paris.

"You see, if they hadn't appointed me and I'd remained where I was, I would have had to do military service. I actually received my call-up papers today. But I wouldn't have gone at any price. So, this way, everything has been solved. Do you see what I mean?"

Of course I do, dear Cioran. I don't want to be nasty with him. (Especially not here—what good would it do?) He is an interesting case—remarkably intelligent, unprejudiced, with a twin dose of cynicism and idleness.

January 21st. Revolution? Coup d'état? [The Iron Guard had launched an armed rebellion against Antonescu, accompanied by a pogrom.] In the evening, some five to six thousand Legionaries demonstrated on Calea Victoriei, chant-

October 20th. On Saturday evening I went out with Leni [Caler, an actress] and [her husband] Froda. I drank a lot, on purpose. (I'd like to drink all the time, so as to forget . . .)

While the three of us talked about this and that, I was feeling up Leni beneath the table; she not only let it be done but discreetly helped me along. I spent the whole evening with my hand between her thighs. I watched her, but nothing gave her away. She was talkative, cheerful, attentive, pleasant, and self-assured. And her husband was sitting next to her. And she looked him in the eyes. And that is the woman I loved like a dog for two years.

I, too, finally know Leni the *petite putain charmante*, the one everyone but me has known—of course.

In all likelihood my play will not be performed. There are anti-Semitic pressures that the theatre has no reason to resist. The national conscience does not allow a play by Mihail Sebastian to appear onstage in Bucharest.

I give up.

December 29th. The Goga government has been installed. The first measures of state anti-Semitism are expected for tomorrow or the day after: a citizenship review, probably elimination from the bar and, in any case, from the press.

The papers are lifeless, inexpressive, without any note of protest. I think it is only now that we will start learning what censorship means.

In these conditions, is it not a childish stupidity to be writing literature?

1938

April 12th. Dinner at Mircea's on Sunday evening. I have so much to say to him about the Iron Guard and his unforgivable compromises. There can be no excuse for the way he caved in politically. I had decided not to mince words with him. In any case, there's not much left to mince. Even if we meet again, our friendship is at an end.

May 20th. Yesterday evening, who should appear on the pavement below my open window, walking in her amorous way with an elegant young man? Leni!

How lucky I was to have been at the window just at that moment. A second later and I'd have remained in ignorance, continued to make a complete fool of myself.

(No other interpretations were possible, of course. A man with whom Leni goes for a walk at seven in the evening, on a little side street, is a man with whom she has already slept, or with whom she will soon sleep.)

At Mermoz's, where I thought I'd stop by for half an hour, a party was awaiting me—among them Zoe Ricci, the painter I met last November.

I had decided to get drunk, and never was an evening's boozing more timely. The memory of Leni faded. I spent all evening close to Zoe Ricci. Soon our mutual attraction was being helped along in the usual way, by the other people there, who teased us, drew attention to silences, gave an occasional prod, and turned a simple joke into the beginning of a relationship.

Her body is extremely youthful. She has slanting eyes, slightly overdefined cheekbones, a child's mouth. She kisses timidly, but also with a kind of desperation. Later, at her place—for we left the others without too much embarrassment—she cried in my arms, "How nice it is not to be alone."

When I think about it, the affair with Leni had to end, in any case, so this is not the worst that could have happened.

August 22nd. An exhausting day. I saw Marietta: she is choking with anti-Semitism. Not even the fact that she was talking with me could stop her from ranting and raging against potbellied Jews and their bloated, bejewelled women—though she did make an exception for about a hundred thousand "decent" Jews, probably including myself, since I have neither a potbelly nor a bloated wife.

October 1st. The Munich Agreement. Now we will start to see the kind of pressure that the Hitlerites exert.

It seems logical to expect a move to the right in France and a powerful anti-Semitic lurch in Romania. I can easily envision a new Goga-Cuza government, or perhaps even a gradual transition to a Legionary regime, suitably decked out.

October 15th. As if Leni and Zoe were not enough to complicate my life, now there is Alice Theodorian. She phones me ten times a day.

It's all getting too comical. What an irony of my fate: to be Jewish and to look an *homme à femmes!*

1939

March 20th. The obliteration of Czechoslovakia has affected me as a personal drama. I was reading in the street an account of Hitler's entry into Prague—and I had tears in my eyes. It is so abject and humiliating that it offends everything I have felt able to believe about people.

It would appear that—despite the denials in yesterday's papers—Romania, too, received an ultimatum. For the moment, it is being asked only to dismantle its industry and to revert to a strictly agrarian country supplying Germany alone.

If this is accepted, we shall have the Germans here by autumn at the latest. If it is not accepted, we shall have war in ten to fifteen days.

Emil Gulian, with whom I spoke over the phone on Saturday, suggested that some of us get together and swear that whoever remains alive will edit the manuscripts left behind by the ones killed in battle.

I must confess that I am not particularly bothered about my manuscripts. What concerns me more are the books that I may no longer write—and especially this life, with which I have done nothing up to now.

September 2nd. Strange days of war. The first moment was overwhelming: when the first dispatches appeared yesterday morning about the bombing of Warsaw, I felt that everything was crashing down. I quickly wrote a letter to Poldy [Sebastian's older brother, who lived in France], not even knowing whether it would reach him but feeling a need to say something, to embrace him and offer my best wishes. But I didn't have it in me to finish the letter. I had an intense and painful feeling of farewell—and broke into tears alone.

What I find completely implausible is this brightly lit Bucharest, with packed restaurants and lively streets, a Bucharest at best curious about what is happening, but not aware that a tragedy has begun.

September 8th. It seems that I haven't been called up yet. I am part of that mysteriously safe category "D.1.," which left me as a civilian. Obviously my liberty is only provisional; obviously I can be

September, 1940, the Iron Guard, who fostered pro-Nazi tendencies, including violent anti-Semitism, briefly came to power, and General Ion Antonescu, one of their allies, was proclaimed the country's *conducator*. Four months later, however, he suppressed a coup d'état by the Iron Guard and established his own military dictatorship. The anti-Semitic strategy of the Antonescu regime varied—harsher in the early years, more cautious when German victory in the war no longer appeared certain; most barbaric in the eastern border regions of Bessarabia and Bukovina, where Jews were deported en masse to camps in Romanian-occupied Transnistria, and less virulent in the rest of the country. Yet even in Bucharest, where Sebastian spent the war years with his mother and his younger brother, there were cyclical outbursts of ferocity, grotesque humiliation, and blackmail, as well as periods of forced labor.

The number of survivors of the Holocaust in Romania is as striking as the number of victims. Of the seven hundred and fifty-six thousand Jews registered in Romania in 1930, roughly half as many were still alive in 1944, in part owing to the government's shifting position on "the Jewish problem." The missing were mainly those who had died in Transnistria, plus a hundred and thirty thousand who had been deported to concentration camps in Poland and Germany from the part of Transylvania ceded to Hungary in 1940.

Sebastian's journal proves to be one of the most important testimonies of the Jewish tragedy during that period, comparable to Primo Levi's "Survival in Auschwitz" or the diary of Anne Frank. Unlike Levi and Frank, who write from inside Hell, portraying life in the concentration camps or in hiding, Sebastian writes, with honesty and analytic acuity, from the purgatory of his own room in Bucharest, where he lives with the impending danger of deportation and death, questioning the moments of ease that his provisional freedom allows him: the enjoyment of music, of love affairs, of reading books, writing, or learning English. (His experience was not unlike that of Victor Klemperer, a Dresden Jew, whose diary was published here in 1998.)

COURTESY SEBASTIAN SUB VREMI COLLECTION/CORNELIA STEFANESCU

When Sebastian died, in 1945, one of his brothers hid the nine notebooks that contained his journal, for fear that the oppressive Stalinist regime would confiscate them. They were later smuggled to Israel, with the help of the Israeli legation in Bucharest, and then returned to Sebastian's brother, who had since moved to Paris. It was not until 1997 that the Sebastian family finally released the text for publication. An edited selection, translated by Patrick Camiller, appears here in English for the first time.

—*Norman Manea*

1936

May 3rd. General meeting at the Writers' Association. How can they take seriously such ridiculous farces?

What do I have in common with all that plotting and politicking? What an awful dump of a place, a dump filled with literary types. Horrible, really horrible!

I am feeling poisoned by literature. Why didn't I become an ordinary professional—lawyer, civil servant? Why wasn't I destined to have a house of my own, a life of my own, a love of my own—without complications?

June 25th. I met Camil Petrescu this morning. He repeated what he thought of the latest anti-Semitic attacks.

"It's regrettable, old man. But all Jews have a responsibility for it."

"How's that, Camil?"

"Because there are too many of them."

"But aren't there even more Hungarians?"

"Maybe, but at least they're all in one place, in the same region." (I didn't understand the argument, but I didn't want to insist. What was the point?)

He went on to say, "My dear man, the Jews provoke things: they have a dubious attitude and get mixed up in things that don't concern them."

That is Camil Petrescu speaking. Camil Petrescu is one of the finest minds in Romania. Camil Petrescu is one of the most sensitive creatures in Romania.

September 25th. Yesterday evening Mircea [Eliade] flared up in the middle of a fairly calm conversation about foreign policy, raising his voice with that terrible violence that sometimes surprises me.

"Titulescu? [An anti-German Minister of Foreign Affairs] He should be executed. Put in front of a machine-gun firing squad. Strung up by the tongue."

I should like to eliminate any political reference from our discussions. But is that possible? Street life impinges on us whether we like it or not.

Will I lose Mircea for no more reason than that? Can I forget everything about him that is exceptional—all that is youthful, childlike, and sincere in him?

He is able to work comfortably with the anti-Semitic *Vremea* [a newspaper], as if there were nothing untoward about it. Nevertheless I shall do everything possible to keep him.

1937

January 8th. Sinaia. In some four hours of work, I barely managed to write three pages—and even these were full of corrections. I so much envy Mircea's prolificness.

I thought a lot about this yesterday on a walk in the mountains. I have a certain lack of spontaneity, which no other quality can ever overcome. So I can create stories of two hundred pages, with the tone of a private diary, but not a novel. I also think I could write very well for the theatre; it has a number of standard routines that help me along, because I am so lacking in imagination. . . . If I were not a Jew and my plays could be performed, I would most likely have become a "dramatist" and nothing else.

January 15th. Bucharest. I haven't seen Marietta [Sadova, an actress] for a fortnight. She's been having an attack of anti-Semitism: "The yids take the bread from our mouths; they exploit and smother us. They should get out of here. This is our country, not theirs. Romania for the Romanians!"

February 25th. Yesterday evening, there was a little party at our place. Mircea, [his wife] Nina, Marietta, [her husband] Haig, Dinu [Noica].

I wonder if this won't be the last time I ask them round. I don't feel I can stand the duplicity that our friendship has required since they went over to the Iron Guard. Is friendship possible with people who have in common a whole series of alien ideas and feelings—so alien that I have only to walk in the door and they suddenly fall silent in shame and embarrassment?

DIARY

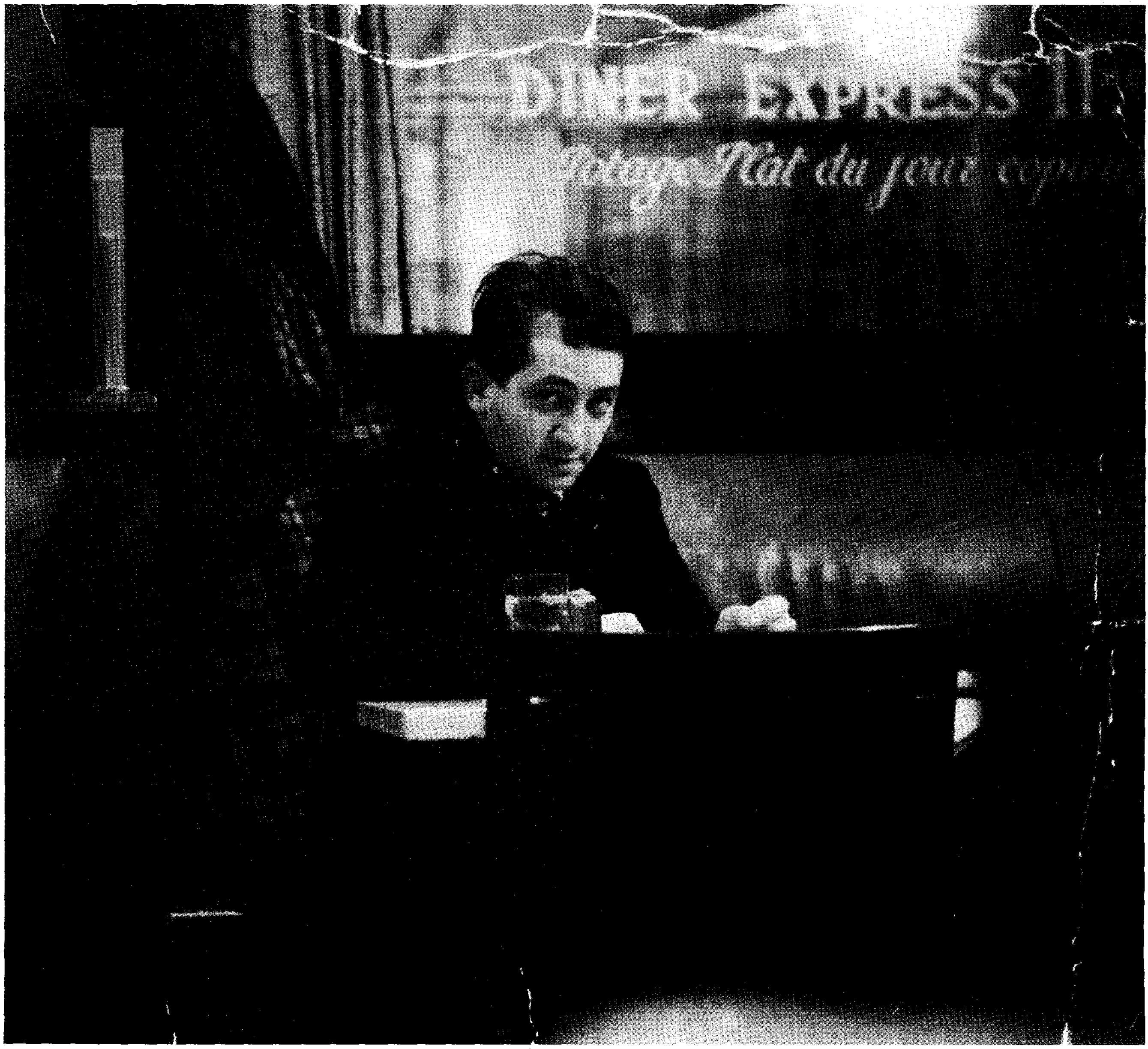
FRIENDS AND FASCISTS

In wartime Bucharest, a writer watches the world around him succumb.

BY MIHAIL SEBASTIAN

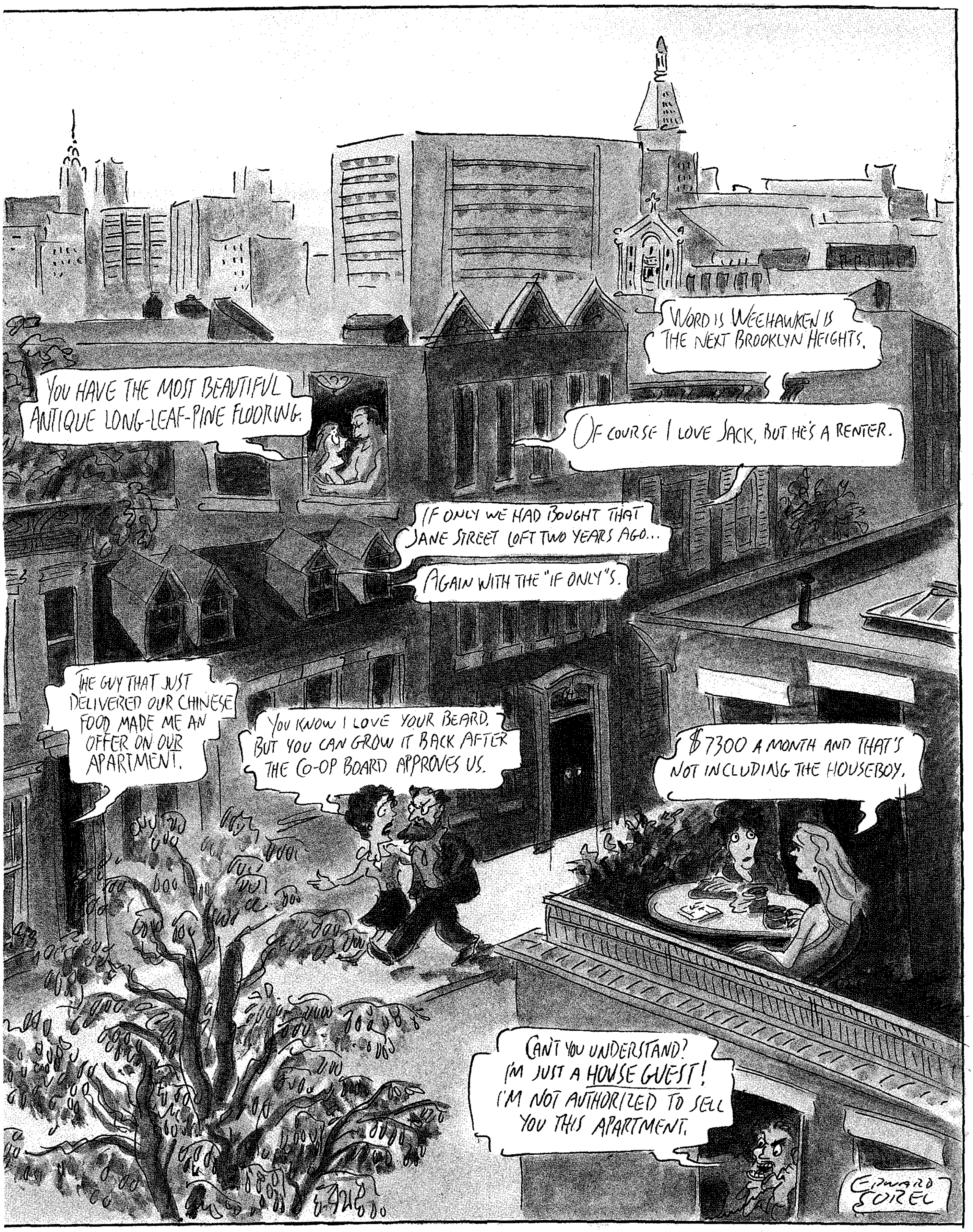
When the Romanian Jewish writer Mihail Sebastian began keeping a diary in 1935, at the age of twenty-eight, he was already well known as a journalist, playwright, and novelist. An assimilated Jew, he felt contempt for tribalism and was skeptical of ideological causes: "I have faith only in the individual man, but in him I have a great deal of faith," he wrote that year. He was part of a brilliant literary group that included Mircea Eliade, Eugène Ionesco, Camil Petrescu, E. M. Cioran, and Constantin Noica, but when many of his friends became involved with the Legionary movement, an extreme right-wing group also known as the Iron Guard, he was forced to distance himself from them. (Eugène Ionesco was the only one who refused to embrace totalitarianism.)

During the sociopolitical crises of the nineteen-thirties, anti-Semitism became prominent among both the population at large and the intellectual élite. Early in 1938, the government of Octavian Goga (a talented poet) revoked the citizenship of hundreds of thousands of Jews. In

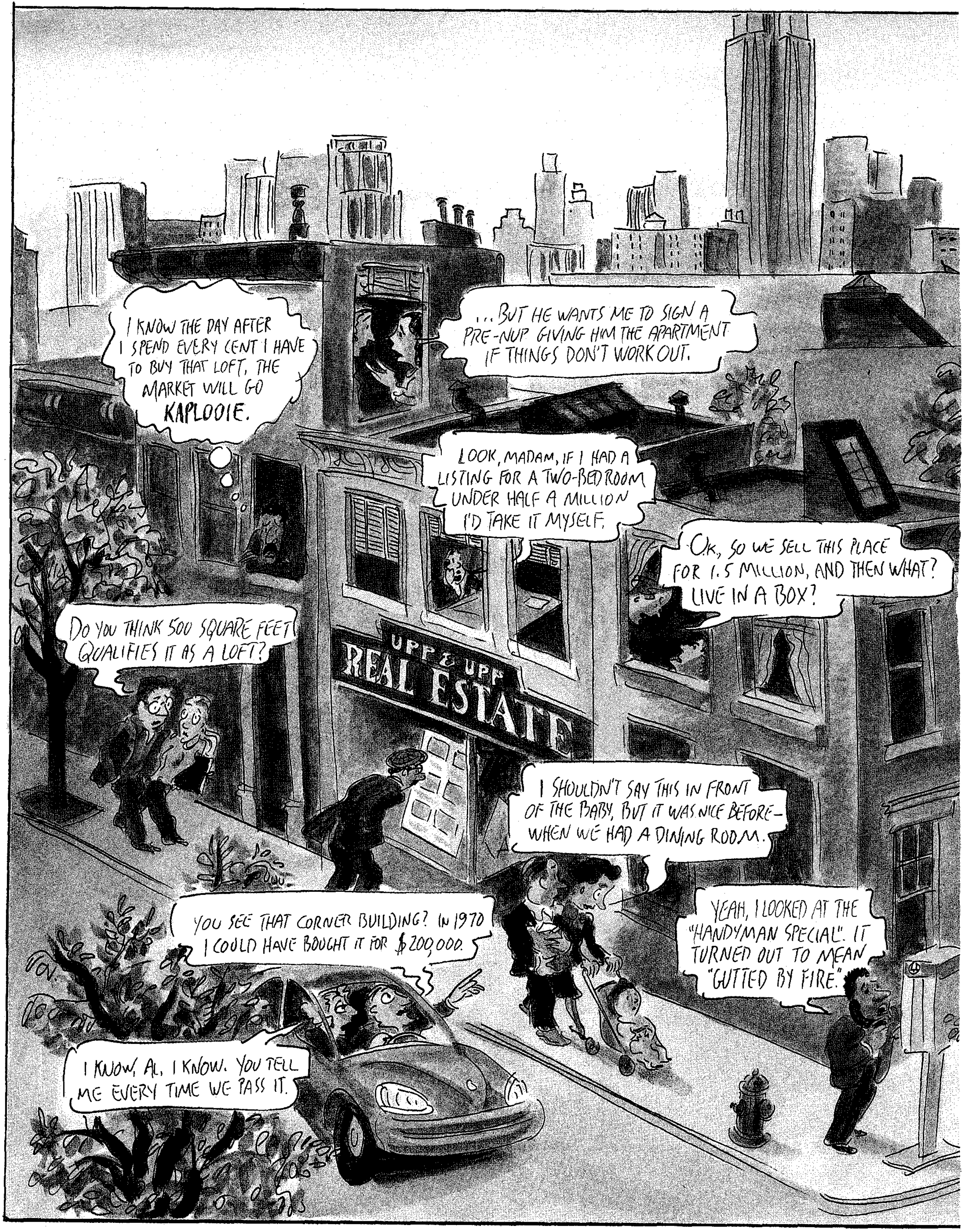


Sebastian in France. "For now the fact is that I remain at liberty. Never has a 'for now' been more precarious or more treasured."

by Edward Sorel


WORD IS WEEHAWKEN IS THE NEXT BROOKLYN HEIGHTS.
YOU HAVE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ANTIQUE LONG-LEAF-PINE FLOORING.
OF COURSE I LOVE JACK, BUT HE'S A RENTER.
IF ONLY WE HAD BOUGHT THAT JANE STREET LOFT TWO YEARS AGO...
AGAIN WITH THE "IF ONLY"'S.
THE GUY THAT JUST DELIVERED OUR CHINESE FOOD MADE ME AN OFFER ON OUR APARTMENT.
YOU KNOW I LOVE YOUR BEARD, BUT YOU CAN GROW IT BACK AFTER THE CO-OP BOARD APPROVES US.
$7300 A MONTH AND THAT'S NOT INCLUDING THE HOUSEBOY.
CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND? I'M JUST A HOUSE GUEST! I'M NOT AUTHORIZED TO SELL YOU THIS APARTMENT.
EDWARD SOREL

AUTUMN IN NEW YORK


I KNOW THE DAY AFTER I SPEND EVERY CENT I HAVE TO BUY THAT LOFT, THE MARKET WILL GO KAPLOOIE.
...BUT HE WANTS ME TO SIGN A PRE-NUP GIVING HIM THE APARTMENT IF THINGS DON'T WORK OUT.
LOOK, MADAM, IF I HAD A LISTING FOR A TWO-BEDROOM UNDER HALF A MILLION I'D TAKE IT MYSELF.
OK, SO WE SELL THIS PLACE FOR 1.5 MILLION, AND THEN WHAT? LIVE IN A BOX?
DO YOU THINK 500 SQUARE FEET QUALIFIES IT AS A LOFT?
UPP & UPP
REAL ESTATE
I SHOULDN'T SAY THIS IN FRONT OF THE BABY, BUT IT WAS NICE BEFORE—WHEN WE HAD A DINING ROOM.
YOU SEE THAT CORNER BUILDING? IN 1970 I COULD HAVE BOUGHT IT FOR $200,000.
YEAH, I LOOKED AT THE "HANDYMAN SPECIAL". IT TURNED OUT TO MEAN "GUTTED BY FIRE."
I KNOW, AL, I KNOW. YOU TELL ME EVERY TIME WE PASS IT.

tional. He could put it on a credit card but that, too, takes electricity. "You could owe me till next time," his sister mildly says. He ignores her and stares into his wallet at the edges of gray-green money as if a miracle will sprout.

And it does: the lights come on. The machinery of the place begins to hum all around them. "I'll have to open up again," the waitress complains. She taps off a dot-matrix slip and he takes a five and two ones out of the change. "*Thank* you, sir. You two have a nice rest of the day now."

Brewer is still a place where a tip of more than ten per cent wins some gratitude. "Good lunch," Nelson tells her. "Good and healthy. Lots of crumbs on the pie, like my grandmother used to bake."

"Come again," she says, but automatically, moving on sore feet to wipe their table and reset it with paper placemats.

Outside, the wind is bright again, whirling the droplets off the Bradford-pear trees. Annabelle's booties glisten; she ties the red scarf beneath her chin, making her face look graver and slimmer. A spattering hits it, and she winces, then smiles. She doesn't know what to expect next. He wants to hand her the world but doesn't know quite how. "That was fun," he tells her. "We'll be in touch." And kisses her on the cheek, tasting the rain, imagining her skin as half his, thinking, *My sister. Mine.*

"She's Dad's, all right," he tells his mother. "That same weird innocence, that way of riding along."

"She wasn't just riding along the day she came here," Janice says. "She was determined, that little short hairdo and showing off her legs."

"How would you like to have her here again? Invited this time with some other people."

"What other people? What am I supposed to say—this is my dead husband's bastard daughter from forty years ago? It was humiliating enough at the time, that whole nightmare, Nelson. I don't see why I should put myself through it again. I can't believe you're asking me—aren't social workers supposed to be so sensitive?"

"Not to their own families, necessarily. Mom, she's *family*. We can't just ignore her, now that we know she exists. Just a family dinner, maybe with Ronnie's boys."

Janice's brow wrinkles. "I don't quite see it, Nelson, as being anything but forced and awkward. Just because this dead slut wished this girl on us—"

"Mom, she's my *sister*. Listen, if she can't be a guest in this household, maybe the time has come for me to move out. Pru always said I should anyway, for my self-respect."

"She did? She said that?" Janice had imagined that she and her daughter-in-law had shared the house pretty well, all those years after Harry died. She had been off most of the day doing real estate, and the younger woman had had to be home with the children and naturally had cooked the meals and did the housework and some light lawn work. It was only right, instead of paying rent. After she and Ronnie married, it was never so easy. There were currents. Ronnie had his own ideas about how things should be done, in the kitchen and everywhere else. The way Thelma had always taken care of him, he was particular. Thelma spoiled men: it was a kind of malice, and lasted after her.

Poor Nelson. He has this bee in his bonnet—doing something for this girl nobody knows. It clutches at Janice's heart, to think that he always wanted more of a family than they could give him—a bigger, happier one. The boy had wanted her and Harry's happiness so. When they quarrelled even without much meaning it his little face would go white with worry, like a bubble trying not to burst. And all this healing he still wants for everybody, it makes her heart gripe to think of how they must have hurt him.

"I don't know, Nelson." Janice yields. "Maybe at Thanksgiving. She'd get lost in the crowd."

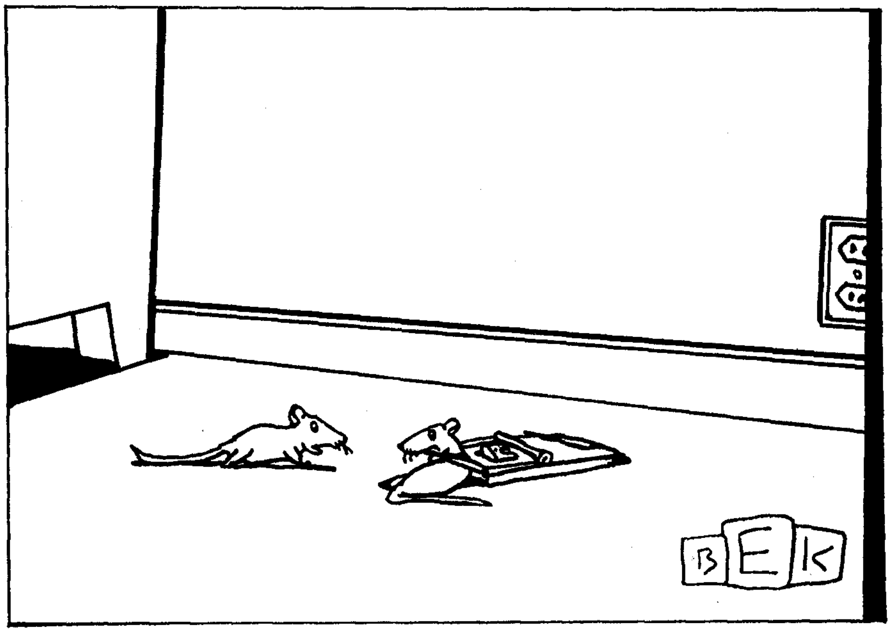
"Mom, that's forever away."

"Close enough for us to get used to the idea. I'll have to approach Ronnie. I know he'll be dead set against it."

But when, that night or the next, in their bedroom, she describes to her husband Nelson's silly sad desire, and puts forth her Thanksgiving suggestion expecting it to be knocked aside, Ronnie says, his voice dragged into a more youthful, thuggish register, "Well, I guess it wouldn't kill us. It'd be interesting to see how Ruth Leonard's daughter turned out."

He pronounces her name, which Janice always has trouble remembering, so easily; it brings home to her that Ronnie and this slut had been lovers, some weekend down at the Jersey shore, back before Harry got to know her himself, which had always galled him, though Janice could never see that he had the right to mind. But Harry had been like that: he thought he had a lot of rights, just by being his wonderful self. ♦

(This is the first part of a two-part story.)



"I'm sorry—here I am going on and on and I haven't asked you a thing about being caught in a trap."

HAVE FUN WITH IT.
P.C.VEY

• •

they are fair. He remembers his father digging in a garden he had made in the back yard, even building a little wire fence to defend the vegetables against rabbits.

The waitress is standing there in her green apron. "Could I interest either of you in any dessert?"

Nelson said, "I thought you closed up."

"Yes, well, I did, but the cook's still out back, he thinks the power may be coming back on. We have tofu, honied oatcakes, puffed goat cheese baked in little ramekins, and lo-cal frozen yogurt. That's lo-cal, not local. And lately we've put in some home-baked pies, since people kept asking. They *are* local. Let me see—shoo-fly, lemon meringue, and apple crumb. We may have a piece of the rhubarb still left. We can't warm them, though, as long as the power's out."

She is the mother, it comes to Nelson, that he and Annabelle have in common. The waitress is pure Brewer, her face squarish and asymmetrical, like a bun pleasantly warped in the oven. Good-humored suffering—sore feet, errant sons, daily complaints—radiates through her uniform. And yet, though this woman feels old to him, she is possibly not much older than they are—somewhere in her forties.

"The apple crumb sounds good," he says, not wanting this enchanted lunch to end. For what happens next? It's not like a first date, where a second or third leads to fucking.

"I shouldn't," his sister declares, "but let me try the honey oatcake."

The waitress says, lowering her voice confidentially, "It tends to be a little dry. My advice would be to have it with a scoop of the vanilla frozen yogurt. On the house. If the power stays off, it'll all be melting anyway."

"You're wicked," Annabelle tells her. Her plump face beams, her eyes shine like a birthday child's as she assents.

"So," he says. "I don't think I've told you much about my—our—father. Mom has a lot of photos and clippings back at the house—would you like to look them over sometime?" He wants to give her her father, his father, but when he holds out his hands the dust pours through them, too fine and dry and dead to hold. Time has turned the spectacular man to powder, in just ten years.

"I don't think your mother wants me in the house again," says Annabelle.

"Of course she does," he says, knowing she doesn't, and adding, "It's my house, too," when it isn't, yet.

"I thought one of you said green tea," the waitress says, putting down two cold desserts and two steaming cups. "The water was still hot, and they all claim it's good for you. The Japanese live longer than anybody. They had on the news these two female twins, over a hundred, that are like rock stars to them."

"Green is great," Nelson says, to chase this motherly woman away. When the siblings have their privacy back, he says to his sister, "This is great, meeting you. I just wish my father could have known you. He hated not having a daughter."

"That's unusual, a bit. Weren't all men his age male chauvinists?"

"He wasn't crazy about males, me included. I think he saw us all as competition."

"Oh, my. This is so nice. When will we get together again, I wonder," Annabelle says. She has this frontal mode, part of her innocence. How innocent can you be, at the age of thirty-nine, in the year 1999?

"Soon," he promises, wondering what he has taken on. "I want to work something out. You should meet more people than just me."

"Oh?"

"Sure," Nelson says, in confident, big-brother style. In the same style he signals to the waitress, who has been standing behind the counter, looking out at the storm through the window beside the tall aluminum urns of cooling coffee and hot water.

"I keep waiting for branches to fall," she tells them, "but they don't, quite."

The twilight gloom in the place does seem to be lifting. Nelson cups his hand behind the flame and blows out the candle. The waitress brings their bill handwritten on the back of a menu card torn in half. $11.48. "I hope you have the right change because with the power out I can't get into the cash register to make any."

Nelson looks into his wallet and has one one and the rest twenties. The A.T.M.s only dish out twenties, encouraging consumers to spend faster. New bills, too. He hates how big Jackson's face has gotten, and the way it's off center. His expression is more wimpy. They've turned this old Indian-killer into a Sensitive New Age Guy. It looks like play money.

Annabelle sees Nelson hesitate and asks, "Do you want some money from me?"

"Absolutely not."

The waitress may have been motherly, but he's damned if he's going to leave her an $8.52 tip. Nor does he want to take Annabelle's money: it would give the whole encounter a pipsqueak flavor. He is trapped, pinched, squeezed between impossible alternatives: dysfuncbrings their salads. "Oops," she says. "Can you two lovebirds see to eat, or shall I hunt up some candles?"

"We can see enough," Nelson says. In the gloomy light, flickering as the wind outside lashes the trees, Nelson leans forward and softly explains to his sister, "He was beautiful. He was tall, about eight inches taller than me, and had an old athlete's nice easy way of moving. It pained him that I wasn't more like him. He had been a wonderful basketball player in high school, back when it was still a white game."

"That doesn't exactly make a life, does it, though?" Annabelle asks, lifting the first forkful of salad to her face. She has a slightly eager way of eating, keeping her mouth closed in a satisfied smile as she chews, her upper lip shiny with salad oil.

"That's what everybody kept telling him all his life," says Nelson. "But I don't know. At least it was *some*thing, to remember about yourself. I have nothing like that to remember about myself."

"What about your family?" she asks, before taking the next bite, being careful to keep the bacon bits balanced on the piece of spinach.

"They left me. My wife, Pru, who you saw pregnant that time, left me over a year ago and took the kids. Back to Ohio, where she's from. Akron. I met her when I was a student at Kent State." He doesn't say she was a secretary, he is embarrassed about that. "My girl, Judy, is nineteen, twenty next January, and off everybody's hands except a bunch of boyfriends', and the boy, Roy, and I keep in touch by E-mail. He's fourteen and knows more about computers than I ever will."

"Why did she leave? Pru."

"I don't know. I guess I disappointed her. She thinks I'm a pipsqueak."

Annabelle waits to finish chewing and says urgently, "Nelson, you're *not*. You're a caring, intelligent man."

"Yeah, well. You can be that and a pipsqueak, too. I can be frustrating. Pru always wanted us to get a house of our own and I could never see the point, my mother sitting on all those rooms over in Mt. Judge. I didn't want to leave her alone."

"But now she's married."

"Yeah. But then I didn't want to leave her alone with my pretty awful stepfather. Hey—do I sound normal, or do I sound sick? When I'm over with my sickos I don't have to listen to myself. I just let *them* talk. Boy, do some of them babble. Everybody thinks their little story is the story of the universe."

The waitress comes back from the kitchen and puts an unlit candle in a pottery holder on the booth table and lights it. "You didn't have to do that," Nelson tells her. "We're about to go."

"Why go?" The waitress saunters to the door and looks out its half-window at the whipped, glistening city. "Pitch black in the east," she says. "Over behind the courthouse." A cardboard sign tucked into the molding says on this side in Day-Glo letters "Closed." She takes this sign and reverses it so that "Closed" faces the street. The couple in the booth hear the lock click. "The stove and grille are out," the waitress explains.

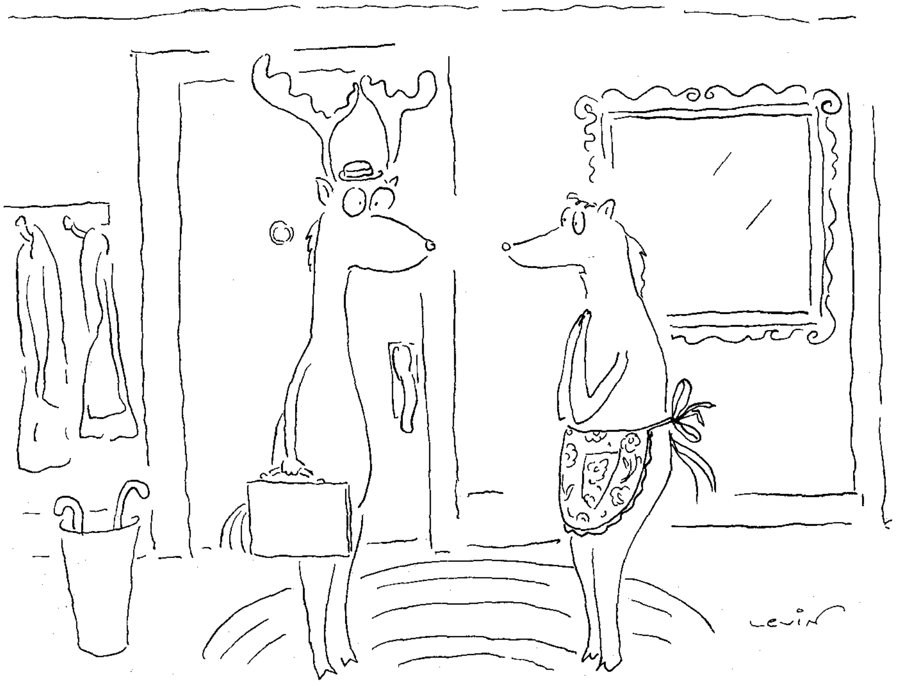
Nearer, Nelson hears this other female voice, as soft, as transparent, as the voice inside his head, say, "Tell me more about your father, as you saw him." The girl is trying so hard to be sweet. Maybe she is sweet. But Nelson dislikes talking about his father. It pulls something too obscure and precious out of him.

"I saw him, eventually," Nelson says, "as a loser, who never found his niche and floated along on Mom's money, which was money *her* father made. But being a loser wasn't the way my father saw himself. He saw himself as a winner, and until I was twelve or so that was the way I saw him, too."

"I loved my father, too," says Annabelle, "the man I thought was my father. He could fix anything—you know how around a farm everything is always breaking down, he never let on he was flummoxed, just would sigh and settle down to it. He had this wonderful confident, patient touch—with my mother, too, when she'd let her temper fly. Whenever my patients get to acting up, I try to think of him and act like he'd act."

Nelson's inner ear tells him there is something wrong with this, something hollow. But it may be that his ear is jaded, hearing all day about families, dealing with all the variations of dependency and resentment, love and its opposite, all the sickly inturned can't-get-away-from-itness. If society is the prison, families are the cells, with no time off for good behavior. Good behavior in fact tends to lengthen the sentence.

"He sounds great," he grunts. "Every time my father tried to fix anything around the house, it got broken worse." He hears these words and wonders if



"My God, what's wrong? You look like you were caught in the headlights."

• •

thinking how nice you were. I admired your ear."

"My ear?" Self-consciously she touches her right ear, exposed by the fluffy shortcut hair there. Her hair, a touch damp from waiting in the rain, is brown, with pale highlights that seem natural and a fair amount of gray sprinkled in. Time is pressing on her, though her face pretends not to feel it.

"It hadn't been pierced." He doesn't say it reminded him of his own. He had also liked the way she bulged toward him in certain places, her plump upper lip and the fronts of her thighs when she stood. Some would say she was heavy now but in this county the men are accustomed to that. How had she avoided getting married?

"My mother wouldn't let me," Annabelle was saying. "I guess it was superstitious of her, she said she liked me natural, the way I had been born. Boy, I wonder what she would say with some of the girls now. Even the young nurses, the body piercing, navel, nipple, you name it. I ask them, how can it be sanitary, and they say their boyfriends like it. One more thing to play with, I guess." She blushes and lowers her eyes.

The soup comes, the flowery thin soup that the Greenery cooks up, with broccoli florets and frothy bean sprouts and slices of water chestnut so thin as to be transparent. Nelson and Annabelle bend their faces into the heat of the soups and realize that their time together is being consumed. "I'm sorry I don't remember that party better," she says. "Maybe I was stoned."

"No, no, it was me who was stoned. Stoned or wired, that's what I usually was back then. After my father died, ten years ago, I got religion, more or less, and got the certificate to be a mental-health counsellor. Don't you think it's strange, by the way, the way both you and I are caregivers?"

"Not if we're related," she says. "And health care is an expanding field, as the world fills up with people that would have been dead a hundred years ago. Everybody winds up needing care, pretty much."

"Yeah, you wonder if it's worth all this effort. I mean, you're keeping these Alzheimer's wrecks going when they don't even know enough to thank you, and I knock myself out to keep a bunch of dysfunctionals from killing themselves, when if they did it it would save the government a fair amount of money."

She looks at him, her mouth prim until she swallows the spoonful of soup, and says, "*Nel*son. You don't mean that. In the abstract, you can feel that way, but when you're face to face with the patient, even the worst Alzheimer's, it feels very different. You know it's worth it. There's something in there, a soul or whatever, you have to love."

"Especially when we're being paid to love it," he says, wondering if one of the water-chestnut slices has gone bad. A specialty place like this, you don't get the turnover to keep the produce fresh; they give it one more day than they should. The customers here when Nelson and Annabelle entered are leaving one by one, though a small cluster waits this side of the door for a squall of rain to let up. The ceiling lights glow as if evening were coming on, though it's not yet one o'clock.

"Tell me about him," Annabelle demands.

"Who?" Though he knows.

"Our father."

Nelson shrugs. "What's to say? He was narcissistically impaired, would be my diagnosis. Intuitive, but not very empathic. He did what he wanted and let other people lump it. I mean, this is not a constructive personality we're talking about."

"He doesn't sound so awful."

"Did I say he was awful? He was careless and self-centered, but he had his points. Since he never grew up himself, he could be good with children, even with me when I was little. The smaller you were, the better he related. He was a better grandfather than a father, since he could clown around and have no direct responsibility and not give you a sinking feeling. Me he kept giving a sinking feeling."

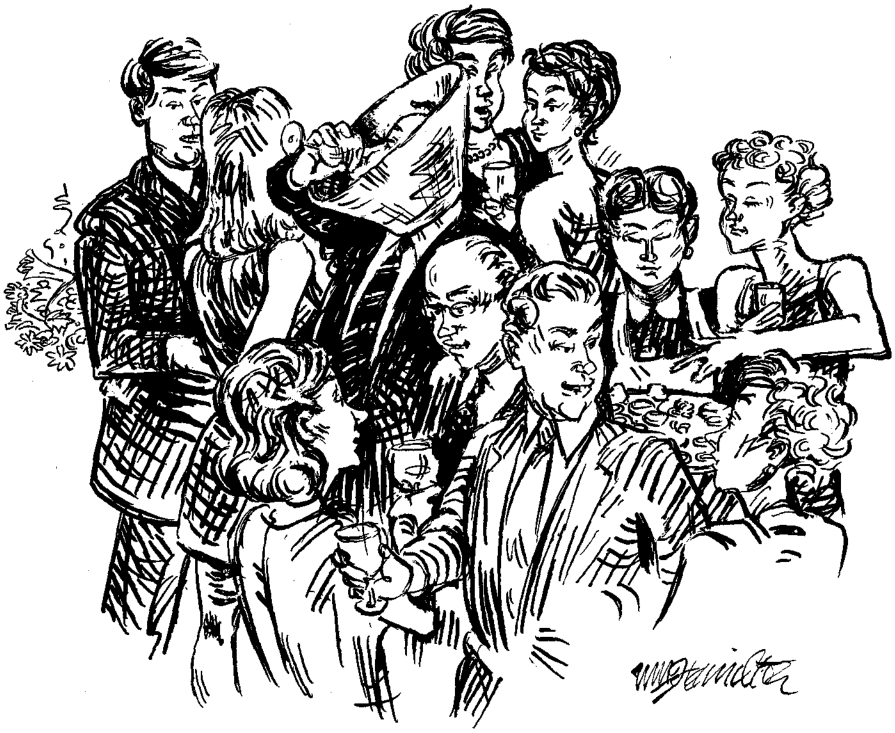
"Yet you sound fond of him."

"Hell, he was the only father I had. What am I supposed to do, wish him dead?"

Annabelle smiles. Her soup bowl is empty. "Some would say that would be normal."

"That Oedipal crap, you mean? Freud is fun to read, but in the workplace he doesn't hack it. Nobody in the business uses Freud anymore." But he is more stunned by her saying that than he shows. *Would be normal.* He had wanted his father to live, to continue to take care of him. There is a louder scream of wind outside, old tropical storm Floyd. The ceiling lights flicker and then go out.

At the same moment, the waitress



"It keeps him from hitting on women."

III

The body carries on to its own
borders. *In night rain pull up*
spring onions, steam them fresh
with yellow millet. I watch her
slowly from sight: light on her
bare legs, her hair. Hushings,
glimmerings, half-heard things
lacking a name. To be caught out
in a surf of rain. At eye level again.

IV

Time for a little dictation. Hopkins
again. Bless me father. *May 5, 1868:*
Cold. Resolved to be a religious.
Cobalt and Indian red. Mantegna's
draperies. The all unbuckled. Back
to this, then, nutshell of infinite space.
Cloudsphere. Eyelights flying
through glass. Outness. Try to make
the most, no, the least of it. Ragged
robin, bog orchid, asphodel, yes,
under your nose. Just before, in a
surge of insurge, your boot flattens it.

—*Eamon Grennan*

herself: "But it's so beautiful out. Feel the electricity in the air? I heard on the radio driving here the eye is over Wilmington."

"It'll be downgraded to just a tropical storm. North Carolina is where it really hit. Pennsylvania never gets the real disasters."

"Well, that's good, isn't it?" Annabelle asks.

Their heads are at the same level. He wonders if a passerby would spot them as siblings. "Come on, let's go in."

There are six or so other customers, and the last of three booths is free. The interior has that cloakroom scent from long ago of wet clothes and childish secrets. The tidy, self-reliant way Annabelle takes off her white raincoat and red scarf and hangs them up on the peg hooks by the unmarked door to the restrooms touches Nelson; she is an old maid already. But the bright-eyed flounce with which she sits down and slides her way to the center of the table in the booth suggests that she is still hopeful, still a player in whatever the game is.

The waitress, too middle-aged for her short green uniform, comes over from behind the counter and hands them menus prettily printed with leafy borders but already smudged and tattered by many hands. "Also," she tells them, "we've added hamburgers and hot dogs."

Nelson says, "I thought those were against your principles."

She is lumpy and sallow but not above being amused. "They were, but people kept asking for them. We still won't do pizzas and French fries."

"Way out," Nelson says. Laconic responses have become, these eight years, his professional habit, but this occasion will demand more. He will have to give, to lead. To be a provider.

"I love healthy food," says Annabelle Byer.

"Do you know already?" the waitress asks. "Or would you like a few minutes?" Nelson has been coming here once or twice a week since the place opened last spring, but she is showing him new deference now that he has appeared with a companion. Annabelle is a little round-faced and bland compared to the narrow-hipped Latina in high heels and jeans, but she is not an embarrassment as a date; she could be a colleague at the center.

"I know," he tells the waitress. "A cup of that broccoli soup you make—"

"It's not a cream soup," the waitress interrupts. "It's a clear soup, some of the customers call it watery."

"I want it," Nelson insists, "and then the spinach salad, with raspberry vinaigrette, and don't go easy on the bacon bits."

"That's just what I want," Annabelle says, more gleefully than Nelson thinks she needs to.

The waitress is writing. "You said *do* go easy on the bacon bits, or don't?"

"*Don't,*" Nelson and Annabelle answer in unison. Nelson adds, "And, to drink, in view of the weather, a cup of hot tea. Not herbal, caffeine. Lipton's if you have it."

"Me, too," his sister says. He is beginning to see the downside of having one.

"Don't you have any ideas of your own?" he asks her.

"Almost nothing but. If you'd let me order first, as you should have, you'd be seeming to copy *me.*"

"I'd have thought of something different. Their lo-cal Caesar with strips of range-fed chicken can be terrific."

"I love healthy food."

"You said that."

"Well, I'm nervous. This is *strange,* meeting your brother at last, and it was your idea."

"Yeah, and showing up giving my mother the scare of her life was your idea. Sorry about your mother, by the way."

"Thank you. She didn't seem scared, yours. Almost feisty, you could say. She thought I was after her money."

"Well, what else? Not that she has that much." He feels, what he had not expected, at ease enough with this person to be combative, as if they had rehearsed their competition years ago. "You and I met, by the way," he says. "Twenty or so years ago, at a party in an apartment along Locust Boulevard. The hosts were a couple called Jason and Pam. I was with my wife. She was very pregnant, and got drunk and fell down the stairs." The memory still shames him: he had given her the bump that sent her off balance.

"I don't remember any of that," Annabelle says, with her annoying, faintly defiant blandness.

"I remember *you,*" he accuses, "and

strike a deal, "but will these medications ever get his head so right he can go back to work—keep a schedule, pass his courses?"

Another good question. Too good. "Cases vary widely," Nelson says. "With strong family and environmental support, clients with quite severe psychotic episodes can return to nearly normal functioning."

"How near is nearly?" the father asks.

"Near enough," Nelson says carefully, "to resume independent living arrangements and perform work under supervision." To have a room in a group home and bag groceries at a supermarket with an aggressive hire-the-handicapped policy. Maybe. "Remember, though, that many tasks, many daily operations, that are obvious and easy for you and me are very difficult for Michael at this point."

The two wearily try to take this in. Their appointment is winding down. They hear the rain lash at the loose-fitting elementary-school windows in a tantrum, in a world unhinged.

"It's a heartbreaker," says Mr. DiLorenzo. "All those years since the boy was born, I thought I was building it up for him. Building up Perfect."

"Don't look at it so selfishly," his wife says, not uncompanionably. "Think of Michael. Suddenly, where did his life go? Down the drain into craziness."

"No, no," Nelson urges, almost losing his therapeutic poise. "He's still the child you raised, the child you love. He's still Michael. He's just fallen ill, and needs you more than most young men need their parents."

"Need," Mrs. DiLorenzo says, the one word hanging in the air with a weary irony. She pushes herself up, holding on so her purse doesn't slip from her lap.

"What we need," her husband amplifies, rising with her, sighing through his nose, "is peace. And a vacation. And it doesn't look as though we're going to get any. Ever." Like jellyfish changing shimmering shape in the water their faces have gone from fear for their son to fear of him, of the toll he will take.

VESPERS

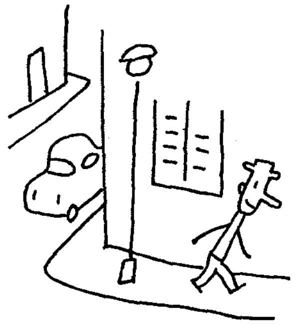
I

At dusk, things take on a light-life
of their own: greens glow, whites
shine, browns grow black, the *silky*
crisped lakewater gleams: wine-
tinted violet. Gravel spectrum:
charcoal to pale beige. With her heart
in her mouth she's dancing, and
her mother, too. A shadow bird
breaks what light is left us, crossing
the window. The music stops.
Night melts, dragging its dreams.
Cat got your tongue?

II

Untutored, the young chaffinch
simply sits, almost invisible
on gravel, taking the world in
that is all other. Blink of an eye.
The world. Again. Blink
of an eye. The ash tree wearing
its jerkin of moss. They go on
making their songs: all around,
the armies running at one another.
Rice wine, plum petals, cuckoo
calling: *kuei ch'u*. Sick for home.

Nelson doesn't argue. The interview has shaken him but he thinks it was healthy that some of these facts were faced. Now he must face, crazily enough, a woman out of nowhere who claims to be his sister. Outside the center, the rain still comes down but is thinner; it is swirled and rarefied by the wind into a kind of sunshine. There is no point in putting up an umbrella, it would be popped inside out. Instead, he runs, slowing whenever he feels his shirt getting sweaty inside his raincoat, staying close to the brick buildings, with a few façades redone in Permastone, on the south side of Elm Street. Plastic store signs bang and shudder overhead, tin mailboxes swing by one screw beside the front doors of four-story town houses turned into apartments, empty aluminum Mountain Dew cans rattle along in the gutter, leaves swish overhead as gusts plow them like keels through upside-down waves. A skinny Latina chick clicks along in high square heels and bluejeans and a pink short-sleeved jersey, chatting into a cell phone. Is this a hurricane or not? The wind traces oval loops through sheets of rain. The clouds above the roofs and chimneys trail tails like ink in water. The odds are less than fifty-fifty, he figures, that his date will show up on such a wild day. He hopes she doesn't; it would get him off the hook.



But there she is, waiting outside the Greenery ("Salads, Soups, and Sandwiches") under a sky-blue umbrella, wearing not fat white shoes as she promised but penny loafers with little clear-plastic booties snapped over them, like bubble-wrapped toys. "Hi. I'm Nelson," he says, more gruffly than he intended, perhaps because he is panting from half running. "You shouldn't have waited outside, you'll get soaked," he goes on in his nervousness, starting their acquaintance on an accusatory note.

She doesn't seem to mind. Her mild eyes, their blue darkened by the blue of the umbrella, take him in as she defends he was always being chiselled. When the Jew died Joe borrowed to buy the business from the widow and named it Perfect Cleaners himself."

"It's prettier in Italian, *perfetto*," Mr. DiLorenzo said, drawing out the word, "but this is America. Things want to be perfect here. Don't mind Maria—Jake was good to me, he taught me the trade. Had me out on the vats first, breathing in petroleum solvents before the switch to perc, then had me as a finisher, on the steam presses, and a spotter, that takes skill—you can ruin a silk blouse, a fine wool suit. After a while it was going so good I opened a branch in West Brewer, and then one up in Hamburg, and two years ago this industrial acreage came up for sale. For a long time I'd been thinking to build a bigger plant, with equipment to take anything. You see these old lace tablecloths, yellow with age, very delicate, and red velvet curtains choking on dust, some of these mansions in Penn Park and north of the city, the owners *never*—"

Nelson has heard enough about dry cleaning. "And you were counting on Michael to take all this over someday."

"Someday, not now. Maybe ten years, maybe less. We have a little place in Florida, the winters here aren't so good for Maria—"

"Don't blame me if you want to go to Florida and stick the poor boy with all these plants, all these employees and their benefits—"

DiLorenzo takes this up enthusiastically, telling Nelson, "It's socialism without being called that. It's putting everybody smaller than Perfect out of business—the benefits, the insurance. There used to be a cleaner every other block. I shouldn't complain, it's good for the bigger outfits, but still you hate to see it. Setting out the way I did back then, with no assets to speak of, I couldn't do it now."

"He *slaves*," his wife says, "and he wants to lay it all on Michael. He wants to go to Florida and look at the girls on the beach and make himself dark as a black."

"The boy was eager, I mean it, with no pressure from me."

"Joe, the boy *felt* pressure. Even his senior year, he was drifting away, into his own world. He was bringing home B's."

Nelson intervenes, to stop their love feast. They love each other, and the child of their hearts is Perfect. "Michael is very angry with himself," he tells them, "for what he calls letting his family down. But, I keep trying to tell him, it's not his fault. It's not *your* fault either. It's no one's fault."

"What is it, then?" Mr. DiLorenzo asks simply, of this invisible invader, this destroyer.

Good question. "It's a," Nelson says, "it's a disorder of the nervous system, having to do with dopamine flow, with the chemical control of the synapses' firing."

"I often wondered about that," Michael's mother breaks in. "When he was so young, thirteen, fourteen, working with his father summers, inhaling all those poisons."

"Get sensible, Maria," her husband says, hoarse from his talking. "Look at me, inhaling all my life."

"It's not that kind of chemistry," Nelson says. "Brain chemistry is very complex, very subtle. That's why we don't like to assign a diagnosis of schizophrenia without six months of following the client and observing his symptoms continuously. What we do know about the disease is that it very commonly comes on in young men in their late teens and early twenties, who have been apparently healthy and functional up to then. Michael does fit this profile. A breakdown early in college is pretty typical." He looks down at the yellow pencil still in his hand. On the upper edge of his vision the faces of the parents before him—it seems to Nelson in a little hallucination of his own—rise like balloons whose strings have been released, but without getting any higher.

"What can we do?" Mrs. asks, her voice fainter than he has heard it before.

"Is there no hope?" Mr. asks, heavier, the chair under him creaking with the accession of weight, the weight of hopelessness.

"Of course there is," Nelson says firmly, as if reading from a card held in front of him. "These neuroleptic medications *do* work, and they're coming out with new ones all the time."

"He says they make him feel not like himself," his mother says. "He doesn't like who he is with the medicines."

"That's a frequent complaint," Nelson admits. "But, without nagging, without seeming to apply pressure, remind him of what he was like without them. Does he want to go back to that?"

"I know you don't like to make predictions," the father says, manly, ready to

1
2
3
ZIEGLER

Michael was like a little prince, detached."

"Don't listen to her, Mr.—"

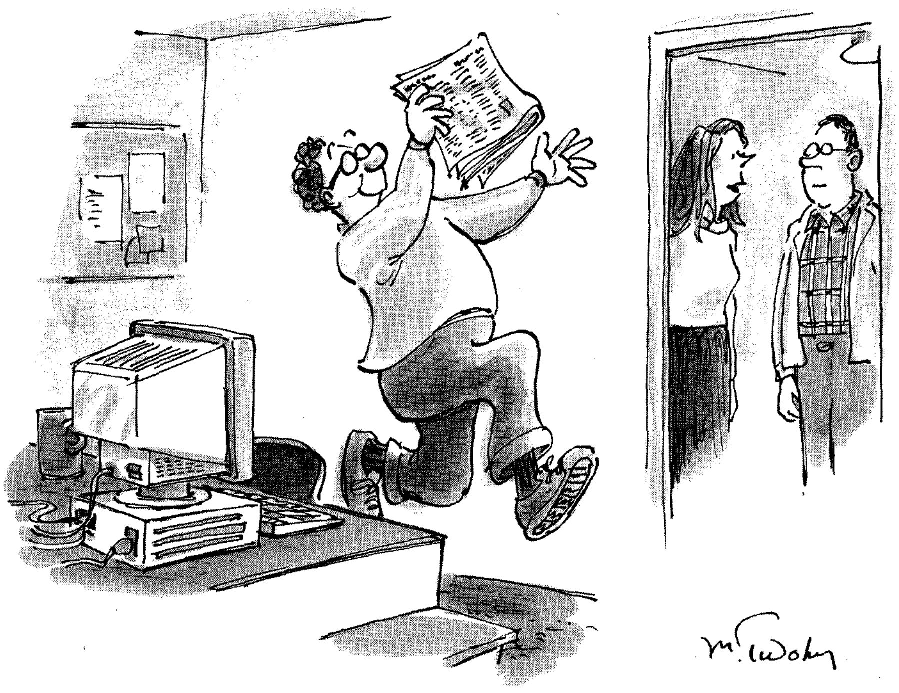
"Angstrom. Nelson if you'd rather."

"Don't listen to her, Nelson. He was fine. He played sports, got the good marks, ran for student council. Said no to drugs, booze. An altar boy, too, until he was fifteen, and we didn't push that. In America religion becomes your own business. I told him, 'Michael, listen, you want to forget the dry-cleaning business, be some kind of professional—a doctor, lawyer, whatever, sit behind a desk using your smarts—that's O.K. with me, and Mamma, too. Whatever makes you happy. This is America.' But no, he wanted to learn dry cleaning, summers, after school, it was what he loved. From me there was absolutely no pressure."

"There was pressure," Mrs. DiLorenzo tells Nelson. "Joe needed him to carry on and he knew it. That he didn't come out and say it made it worse. The girls, they married and got out of here. They'd had enough of it, the chemicals, the presses, the hours until seven, eight. Only one of them even stayed in the state, and she's out near Pittsburgh, a nice suburb up along the Allegheny. Their husbands, what do they care about dry cleaning? It was all on Michael, and he knew it. He snapped. Men don't want their whole lives mapped out for them, exactly. They want adventure. Isn't that right, Mr. Nelson?"

"She's crazy," Mr. DiLorenzo confides. "He didn't want adventure. He wasn't like these young hoodlums these days, their heads full of, what do they call it, hip-hop, grabbing guns and going off to shoot their classmates to make the evening news. He wanted to carry on the family business. There was no pressure. At Penn he was taking chemistry to be on top of the best, the newest solvents, the most environmentally sensitive as we say. Disposal of used cleaners is the number-one headache in this business: a single cancer lawsuit can wipe you out—defending against it, even if you win. I love America, but not its justice system."

"Joe, there was pressure." To Nelson she explains, "My husband, he slaved to build up Perfect. He began by doing dirty work for this old Jew in south Brewer, just a basement in a row of houses, a little dark slot, the big equipment crowded into the back, a shed built illegally, fifty cents an hour if he got that,


McCloskey

"The 'Times' called his novel 'downloadable.'"

• •

clusion. *When you feel uncomfortable*, Howie has told him, *trust your gut. Get off the horse*. "I can't emphasize enough how important it is that you are faithful with your medications. I've made a note here to Dr. Wu to consider the Trilafon dosage."

"I drank beer and tequila at Penn," Michael tells him, uncertainly standing, sensing he is dismissed and being relieved yet not, unsatisfied, uncured. "My parents didn't know it, but I would get fucking blasted. I think that's what screwed up my brain."

"I don't think so. The brain can take a lot of beer. Michael, this is not your *fault*," Nelson says, coming around his desk so that in the tiny office the boy—tall when he stands up, menacing, his mouth sagging, his face glimmering in the rainy light, begging to be understood—has nowhere to go but out, to the waiting room, where his parents are eager to come in.

"Such a gorgeous child," says Mr. DiLorenzo, when a second chair has been pulled up for his wife in front of Nelson's desk. "Bright, good. A miracle boy. To have this boy after his three sisters and Maria over forty, it seemed to us a miracle." He speaks carefully, with dignity, as one who remembers when he spoke English less well, the grandchild of immigrants who spoke it hardly at all. His hair, brushed straight back, is going white but his bushy eyebrows are still black.

The wife speaks up: "Even as a little boy, though, he stood apart a little. He would play with others, but then wander away and come inside. I'd say, 'What's wrong?' He'd say, 'Nothing.' As if he didn't see the point, with them or us, too. He was quiet and never had a tantrum."

"My wife imagines things in retrospect," Mr. DiLorenzo says, sitting back erect, his eyes enlarged by thick spectacles, eyes frayed from closely inspecting fabric. "He was a perfectly normal boy. Got top marks, too, all the way up through senior year. Gave the salutatorian speech about how we should help Russia keep democracy and capitalism. Never any trouble to anybody—teachers, me, nobody."

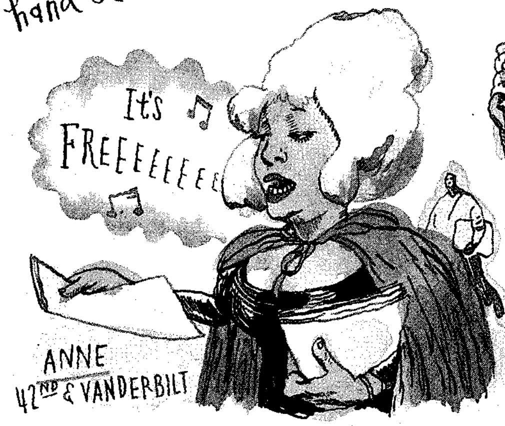
"A little trouble would have been more normal," his wife says. "At the time I wondered if having all those older sisters hadn't taken something out of him. My daughters and me, we had too good a time, always laughing, always busy in the house, always telling each other things.

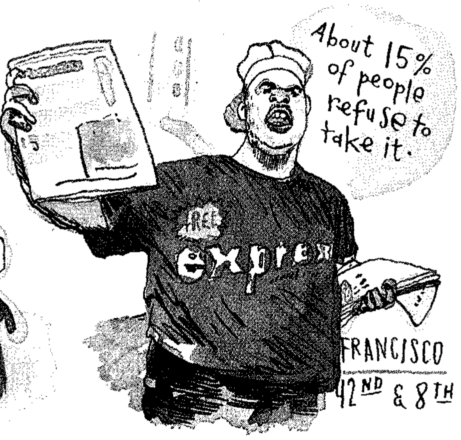
ARTIST AT LARGE BY BARRY BLITT

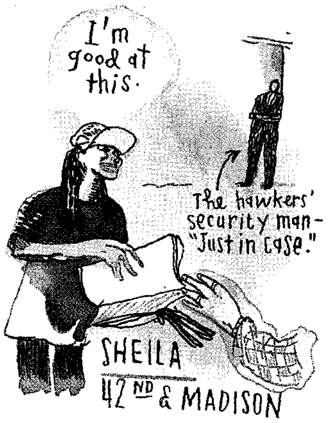
DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

(OF THE LATEST NEW YORK CITY TABLOID WAR)

The battle lines are drawn, weekdays around 4 p.m., when legions of DAILY NEWS hawkers hit the streets of midtown—with brash style—to hand out the EXPRESS, a new, free afternoon edition.

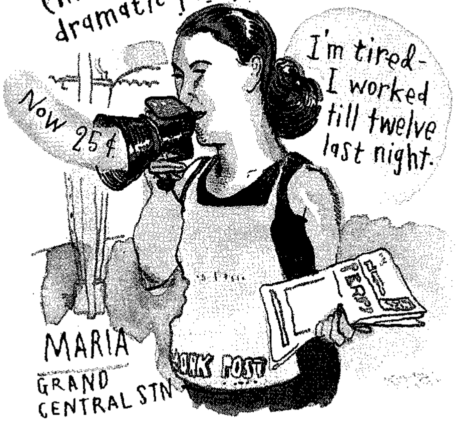

It's ♫ FREEEEEEEEE
ANNE
42ND & VANDERBILT

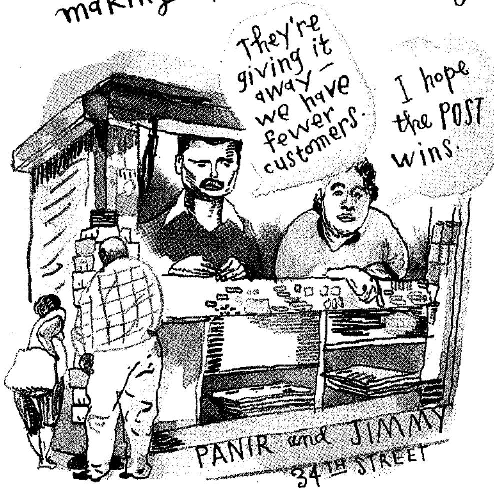

About 15% of people refuse to take it.
FREE express
FRANCISCO
42ND & 8TH

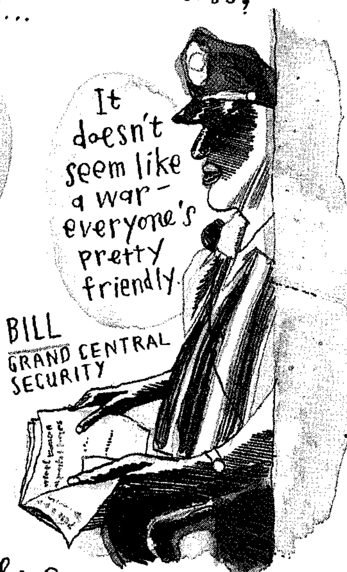

I'm good at this.
The hawkers' security man—"Just in case."
SHEILA
42ND & MADISON

The POST has fired back by cutting its price down to a quarter (making for a less dramatic pitch).

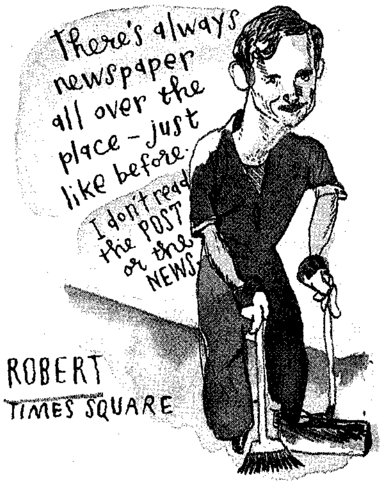
Meanwhile, locals go about their business, making the best of things...

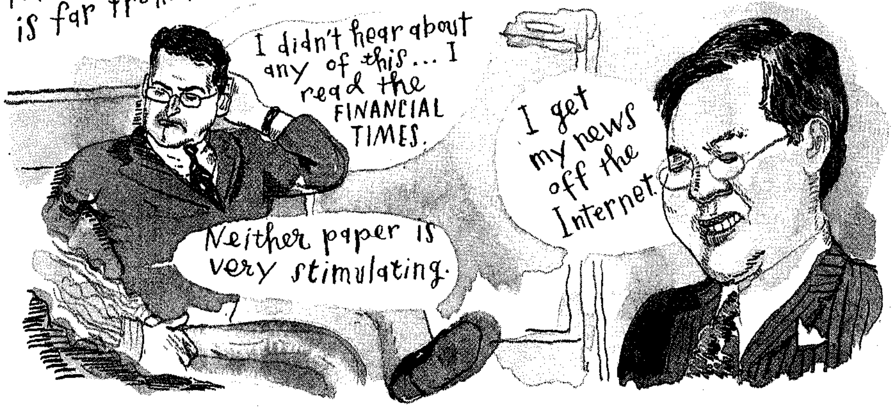

Now 25¢
I'm tired—I worked till twelve last night.
MARIA
GRAND CENTRAL STN.


They're giving it away—we have fewer customers.
I hope the POST wins.
PANIR and JIMMY
34TH STREET


It doesn't seem like a war—everyone's pretty friendly.
BILL
GRAND CENTRAL SECURITY

On the commuter trains (like the 6:16 Metro-North to OLD GREENWICH), the verdict is far from in...


There's always newspaper all over the place—just like before.
I don't read the POST or the NEWS.
ROBERT
TIMES SQUARE


I didn't hear about any of this... I read the FINANCIAL TIMES.
Neither paper is very stimulating.
I get my news off the Internet.

the boy first, and asks the parents to wait.

"Well, Michael. How are you feeling?" he asks when the door is closed and he is settled at his desk. The desk, of minimum size, has a fake-wood-grain top. The young man folds himself into the one-piece molded-plastic chair, orange in color, opposite. He wants to slouch to show how lightly he takes all this, but the chair in its flimsy, scientifically determined form does not permit much of a slouch.

"O.K. Good. The same."

"Voices quiet?"

Michael licks his lips as if abruptly aware of a dryness. "Yes."

He is lying, Nelson knows, but he keeps his eyes down on the young man's folder, opened six months ago. "Taking your Trilafon consistently?"

"Absolutely, sir." This is another lie, Nelson can tell from a certain retraction in the young voice, a telltale flattening, but Michael wants to believe it, he desperately wants to be cured, of an illness that seems to be nothing less than himself, a rot of his most intimate ego, that voice within, where it was nestled supposedly safe in his skull.

"Any side effects from the Trilafon you want to take up with Dr. Wu?" Howard Wu is the center's M.D., here three half days a week. Golden in color, stocky in form, he is much beloved, and frequently laughs, exposing large convex teeth. He is their jolly Buddha.

The boy readjusts his position, perching on the chair's edge and jerking forward. "I feel plugged up. At both ends. It's like a cold in my nose all the time. I feel sleepy all day, and then I can't sleep at night. I feel shitty," he says, and then titters, as if to disown his feeling. A fission, a scatter, in his young face makes him hard for Nelson to look at.

Nelson asks him, "Do you want me to write down 'No voices'? If I do that, Dr. Wu will see no reason to adjust the medication."

His calm gaze elicits from Michael a flutter of avoidance, a batting of the long lashes under the shapely black brows, which have that touch of a built-in frown Italian men have, a thickening toward the bridge of the nose. There is still some bravado, mannerly but dangerous, in the boy's smile, and in the slick way his bouncy black hair was tamed by the comb. The grooming is a positive sign. Or did his mother comb his hair for him today, for this appointment, and see to it that he shaved? "There *were* some voices," he admits, huskily, then smirks as if to dare the world to make much of it.

"What did they say, do you remember?"

No answer.

"What did the voices say?"

"Nasty stuff."

Nelson waits.

"They tell me what a fuck-up I am. They tell me to kill myself. Or maybe I think of that myself, to shut them up."

"Don't ever think that." A renewed surge of rain slashes against the window at Nelson's back. He pictures the leaks venturing, trembling, lengthening, out onto the windowsills of this old school, the paint flaky from previous soakings. "Do the voices say anything else?" Nelson can hardly hear the answer against the noise of the rain.

"They tell me to kill my parents."

This is delivered in a mumble and yet with some defiance. The smirk hangs on his face forgotten. "How does that make you feel?" Nelson asks.

Michael surprises him with a surge of affect: "*Hor*rible. I *love* my parents. They've been great to me, giving me everything I've ever wanted and not putting any pressure on about entering the, you know, dry-cleaning business." His voice is hurrying, to keep up with his brain. "They sent me to college when a lot of parents would have had me go straight into the business. My dad's getting older and hasn't been strong for a while. They sent me to Penn. The finest university in eastern Pennsylvania. So what did I do? I fucked it up."

"You didn't, Michael, you got sick. We're trying to make you better. You're better now. You dress yourself, you're no longer violent—"

"I can be violent at home." He begins to brag, to someone else sitting where Nelson sits. "My mother, what a naggy bitch. She says to stop watching the old movies on TV, get up, get out, do this, do that. I don't see the use."

"The use is what we call psychosocial functioning. Let's look at your graph. You have not been into the center for a week, and then only twice the week before. That's why I've asked your parents to come in with you. They, and Dr. Birkits, and all of us want your attendance to improve." Birkits was the Brewer psychiatrist the DiLorenzos had taken Michael to on the advice of the Penn psych service after his break. Birkits, sensing a hot potato, referred him to Fresh Start.

"I bet you all do," Michael sneers.

"We do, Michael. We want to improve your functioning, and we offer here at Fresh Start a safe environment for you to practice in, with the groups, the activities, the counselling. But you must attend."

"Hey. Sir. O.K. Can I be frank?"

"Of course."

"I can't stand these people. They're fat. They're queer. They're ugly. They're not my type."

"What is your type?" Nelson asks, and instantly regrets the hostility.

"Loser," Michael responds, and laughs, a barking abrupt noise that doesn't belong to his frightened, skidding face. "Loser is my type."

"Not so. You or anyone here. We're human, which isn't always easy. The other clients are kind people, here to help each other. They care about you, if you let them."

"They wouldn't if they knew what's inside my head." He jerks forward in the straight chair. His complexion looks a little clammy, moist at the hairline. The dark eyes swarm with shame and yet with an excitement that something transformingly strange is happening to him. "The voices whisper to me about girls I see on the street. This one and that one. They tell me to picture her shitting."

"Shitting?" Nelson has been betrayed into confessing surprise. Perhaps Michael intended this. He wonders how much of an enemy the boy sees him as. Does he sense, within his mental-health counsellor, some ethnic enmity, some envy of his easy, slender build and dago good looks? When Nelson tries to picture what a schizophrenic sees he remembers Howie Wu telling him, *Their sense of distance has broken down.* Things up close look far away, there is no clear depth in which to locate yourself. The gears that notch us one into the other fail to mesh, maddeningly, meltingly. Trying to think his way into Michael's head plants a sliding knife inside Nelson, an earthquake fault, sickeningly.

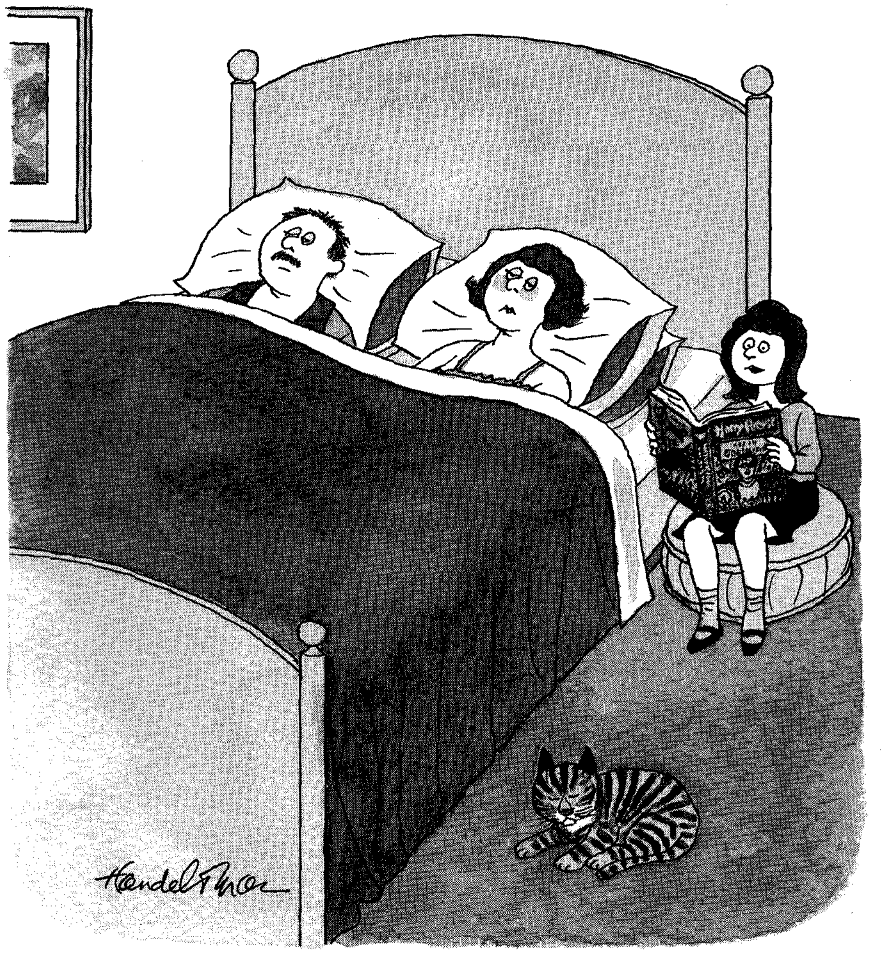
"They show me her squatting down. I want to rub her face in it. I want her to eat it. Does that shock you?"

"No," Nelson lies.

"Well, it does me." Michael slumps back as far as the chair allows him.

"Michael," Nelson says in firm con-an old willow that had sunk its roots in the roadside ditch by the failing mall with the four-screen cineplex and, on the other side of the viaduct, where 422 enters Brewer and becomes Cityview Drive, a gorgeous big tulip poplar at the edge of the park. The car radio is full of this gunman, one more straight-shooting psychotic, who killed seven and then himself in some Texas Baptist church, and terrorist blasts in Moscow killing dozens, and an interesting item which he doesn't quite catch about cocaine addiction linked to a buildup of certain proteins in the brain—it wasn't anybody's fault, it was brain chemistry. As he crosses the park's most open stretch, wind shakes his car so hard that he tightens both hands on the steering wheel.

In Brewer around Eighth and Elm the buildings cut down on the wind somewhat. It's an older area, where commercial meets residential. A former hat factory stands empty but for one little photocopy-and-offset-printing establishment named Printsmart in a lower corner. The treatment center occupies the basement floor of what used to be a three-story elementary school, grades K through six. The parking lot is a strip of diagonal places at the side of the building, where the neighborhood residents stick their rusty heaps at night, right across three spaces, neglecting to wake up in time to take them away.



"Dumbledore smiled, his eyes twinkling."

As Nelson gets out of his Corolla, the sky is darkly bruised in patches above the brick cornices, but the rain seems to be stopping and the air brightening as if to clear. People on the sidewalks, especially the young women who work in the glass courthouse annex a block away, hugging themselves in short sleeves and not even carrying umbrellas, don't seem to know they're almost in a hurricane. The radio said the governor was considering declaring an emergency and sending all state and local workers home, but inside the center the staff has showed up, all but Andrea the art therapist, who lives beyond Pottstown, almost on the Main Line. To snotty, pouty Andrea, a blond-tinged brunette with big rings she makes herself on nearly every finger, Brewer is a hick town with too many religious cranks and dumb Dutchmen.

As the morning wears on, the rain with renewed vigor whips at the basement windows so hard that water begins to dribble across the wooden sills. Years ago this basement was gutted and partitioned into suitable spaces—tiny offices for the staff, larger group rooms for the clients, a reception space, a kitchen where the clients make their lunch, and a dining area, with six round tables, adjacent to the sofas and upholstered chairs of the dayroom, where clients not doing a group or having a consultation can read, knit, play games, and, hopefully, interact. When this was a kindergarten, the five-year-olds learned to tie their shoelaces and fit pegs into holes, but social interaction, socialization, was the main lesson, and for these dysfunctional adults it still is. There are thirty of them, theoretically present from nine to four, and a staff of eight, headed by Esther, a doctor of psychology. Some clients straggle in, drenched and exhilarated about a hardship they are sharing with all of Brewer, but many stay at home with their delusions, anxieties, and television sets. Because of low attendance, Nelson's three-times-a-week group on Relationships is absorbed into Katie Shirk's group on Goals and Priorities. Nelson uses his downtime to catch up on paperwork—progress notes, intake forms—and goes around mopping up windowsills with paper towels.

The DiLorenzos show up, though, all three of them, hurricane or not, at eleven sharp. They are desperate. Their world has come crashing down because of a few misfiring neurons. In the waiting area they give off a stagnant damp odor of bafflement: graying patriarch, swag-bellied but still powerful in the arms and shoulders; mother, a touch of peasant drab still in her plain dark suit, though money talks in her shoes and the silk scarf at her throat; and son, twenty, slim and good-looking, with an almost feminine delicacy, but going soft and pasty with inactivity, and the fear of his own strangeness giving his liquid dark eyes an anxious bulge. Nelson decides to take body getting in touch with this twat."

"Ronnie." Nelson almost never uses his stepfather's name, and says it now softly. "This twat may be my *sis*ter. Dad used to hint sometimes there might be a sister. Here she is, come to us, putting herself at our mercy."

"But what does she *want*, Nelson?" Janice asks. She feels better, clearer in her mind, finding herself now on her husband's side.

"She wants money," Ronnie insists.

"Why, she wants," Nelson says, getting wild-eyed and high-voiced, defensive and, to his mother, touching, "she wants what everybody wants. She wants *love*."

Ronnie turns to Janice conspiratorially. "He's as off the rails as his old man. Rabbit was always being suckered by somebody or other."

"Love does seem a bit much," Janice allows.

"I'll go look her up myself then," Nelson threatens. "You said she's Annabelle, the only A. Byer in the phone book."

"Nelson, believe me," Ronnie says, trying to act the father, "there's nothing in it for you but heartbreak. You've been a victim of Harry Angstrom since you were two, why look for more agony?"

"It wasn't *on*ly agony," Nelson argues. "There were positive elements in the relationship."

Janice chimes in, "Harry loved Nelson, it frustrated him that he could never express it properly."

"Oh come *on*," says Ronnie, in an exasperated voice strong and angry enough to end the conversation. "I knew Rabbit longer than either of you. I knew him since we were kids in knickers snitching penny candy off the counter at Lennert's Variety Store. That conceited showboat never loved a soul outside his own thick skin. His mother had spoiled him rotten."

"Hello?"

"Yes?" Wary. Single women have to be, the world full of phone creeps.

"Is this Annabelle Byer?"

"Yes." Slightly reassured to be named.

"This is Nelson Angstrom."

"Oh! Nelson! How nice!"

A pause; he had thought from her enthusiasm she might go on a little more. He says, "My mother described your visit."

"Did she? I wasn't sure it went very well."

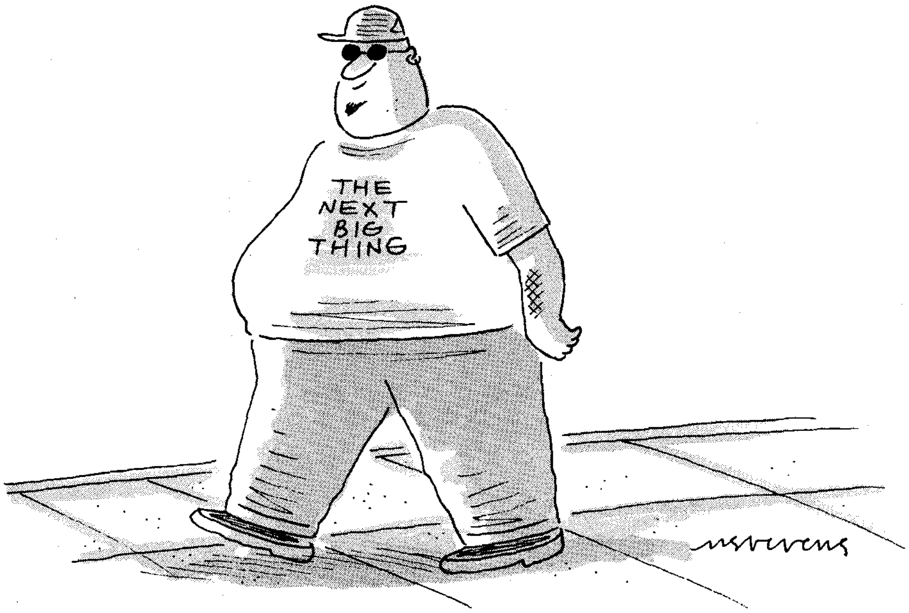
"Oh, yeah. She liked you. She just isn't sure what to make of the general situation. It took her by surprise."

"Me, too. I mean, I was surprised at first, when my mother told me. It shouldn't matter, my being a grown woman and all."

"Oh, but it *has* to matter." He feels more secure, as the conversation tips toward the therapeutic.

"How do *you* feel about it?" she asks.

"I feel good," he says. "Why not? The more the merrier, isn't that what they say? Listen. I was wondering if we could have lunch sometime. Just to look each other over." That was one sentence too many, but then he might as well get the curiosity issue on the table.



She hesitates. Why would she hesitate, when it was she who had come out of the woodwork? "I think I'd like that."

"Tomorrow? Next day? What's your schedule?" he says. "I work at Eighth and Elm, there's a little restaurant opened up in the block on Elm toward Weiser, it's called the Greenery, but don't be put off, it's decent enough, soups and sandwiches and salads, kind of neo-New Age, but they have booths for a little privacy."

"Sounds cute," she says. That slightly puts him off. This may be an airhead, sister or not. After all, what does she have for genes? She asks, "Would you mind not until next Thursday? Until then I'm on day duty, it's an Alzheimer's patient who needs round-the-clock."

"Great," he says. "Thursday the sixteenth. Twelve-thirty O.K.? I'll be waiting outside. Medium height, short haircut these days."

"I'm," she began to say, then giggled, not knowing how to describe herself. "I'll be in fat white shoes."

Wouldn't you know, they have picked the one day in September when a hurricane called Floyd is supposed to hit. All sorts of wind damage and heavy flooding in North Carolina, and then predicted to come right up the Chesapeake into southeastern Pennsylvania. But these forecasters are paid to whip everybody up, and though the wind kept Nelson awake last night, the morning isn't so bad that cars aren't moving on Joseph Street, slowing down to go around a medium-size maple branch that let go. He didn't hear the loud crack; maybe he slept better than he thought. The branch lies in the center of the asphalt like a big piece of roadkill, its leaves' pale undersides up and already withering.

Nelson thinks of phoning Annabelle to cancel but he doesn't want Mom and Ronnie to know he has this planned. Instead he phones his boss, Esther Bloom, who lives in Brewer, and she tells him the center will be open at least until noon. "These people have nowhere else to go, Nelson. A weather event like this brings up survival issues they may need to process."

On the way into town he sees two highway crews, with flashing lights and cops in orange slickers directing traffic, cleaning up fallen trees with chainsaws—

lor's certificate earned ten years later in a year's (1990-91) course of study at the Hubert F. Johnson Community College in new buildings along the river in south Brewer, while living, he and his three dependents, at 89 Joseph Street, with his mother, newly widowed. Over a year ago, his wife took herself and their two children back to Ohio. Nelson sits with his mother and stepfather at the round kitchen table with their makeshift meal and their beverages. He has the Coors, Ronnie a Miller Lite in deference to his blood pressure, and Janice a continuation in an orange-juice glass of the Taylor sherry she nipped on returning home, to wash away the sour aftertaste of the bridge. Like Ronnie said, we're alone. All we have is family, for what it's worth.

Nelson asks, "Mom, did *you* think she was conning you?" Ronnie in concluding the story had given his opinion that this was the case. Nelson generally avoids conflict with his stepfather, though when Janice first announced she might be marrying him he sounded just like Harry, putting Ronnie down.

"Well, I wasn't sure," she says. "She seemed sincere, but then it was kind of brazen, you could say."

"Con artists can be sincere," Ronnie says. "That's what makes them good con artists. They fool even themselves."

"What's worth conning about us?" Nelson asks with his professional mildness, making a question of everything. "We're just scraping by, in a house too big for us, that we ought to be selling. You're retired from the insurance con game and Mom and I work at shit jobs." His eyelashes, always long for a boy's, flutter in his shadowed deep sockets. Janice in fact is proud of the realtor's license she got ten years ago, and of the commissions she sometimes brings home. She likes getting out and meeting people, and no two houses, it turns out, are exactly alike.

Ronnie's thin-skinned face flushes. He says, "For a guy who snorted an entire car agency up his nose, you're one to talk about con games."

Janice intervenes, "As I told Ronnie, she seemed to have enough money. Her clothes were good quality. She drove a red Lexus that looked new."

Nelson flicks a triumphant glare at Ronnie, who drives a four-year-old gray Taurus. To his mother he urges, "I think it's *great* that she had the guts to come around at all. Not that anything that happened back then was her fault exactly. Did she look like Dad?"

"Oh Nelson, I keep being asked that. It seemed to me so, in a way, but then I was looking for it. You know how these resemblances are, something you can't put your finger on. She had a round face and looked hopeful."

Ronnie says, "That could fit anybody, for Chrissake."

"Her eyes—they were pale blue and had a little droop toward the outside corner, like Harry's."

Nelson's eyes, brown like hers, widen with interest. It pleases his mother to see him engaged. He must be like this at work; he comes home drained and irritable. "I think we should have her here," he says.

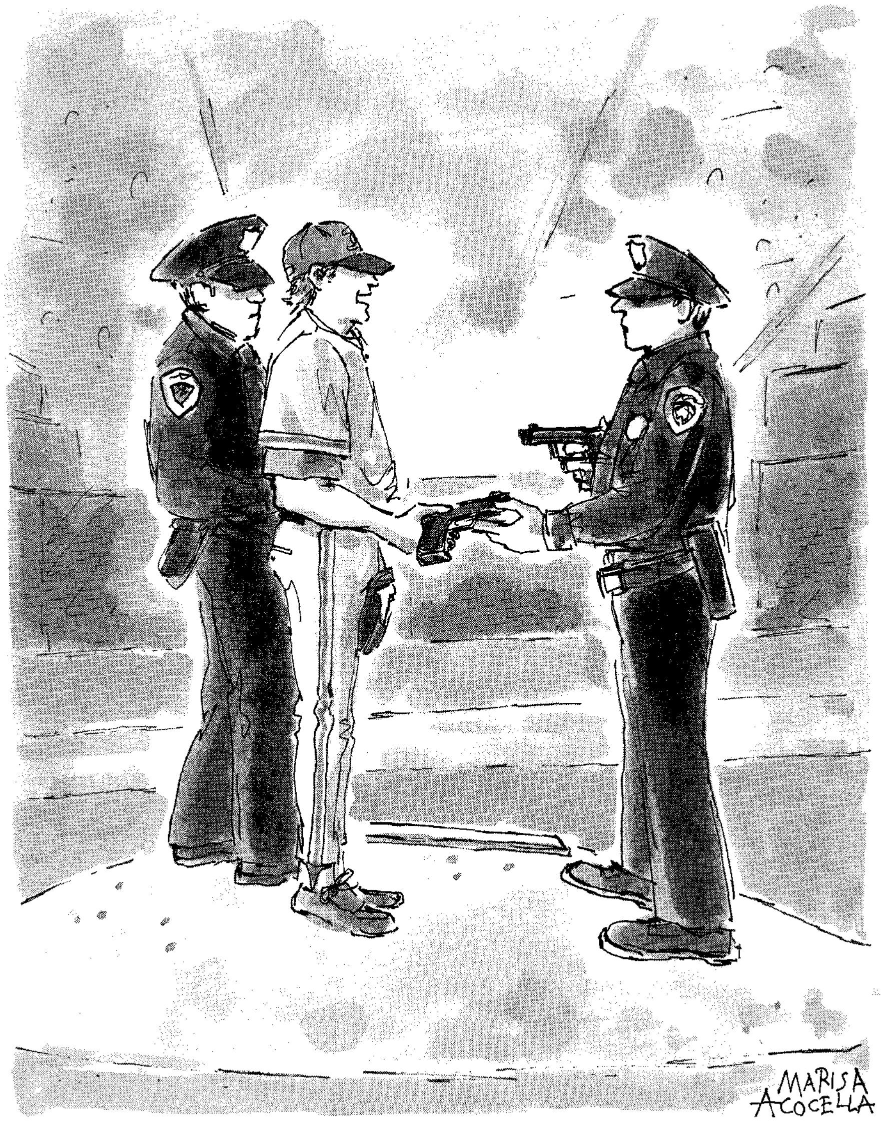
Ronnie is firm. "That's a mistake. Give her an in, you'll never get rid of her. Why should we all get our lives disrupted because"—he gropes for a non-insulting name—"Nelson's dad screwed this dead cow back in the dark ages?"

"I thought you went with her, too," Janice says, herself quicker than usual, alert. "Was she such a cow then?"

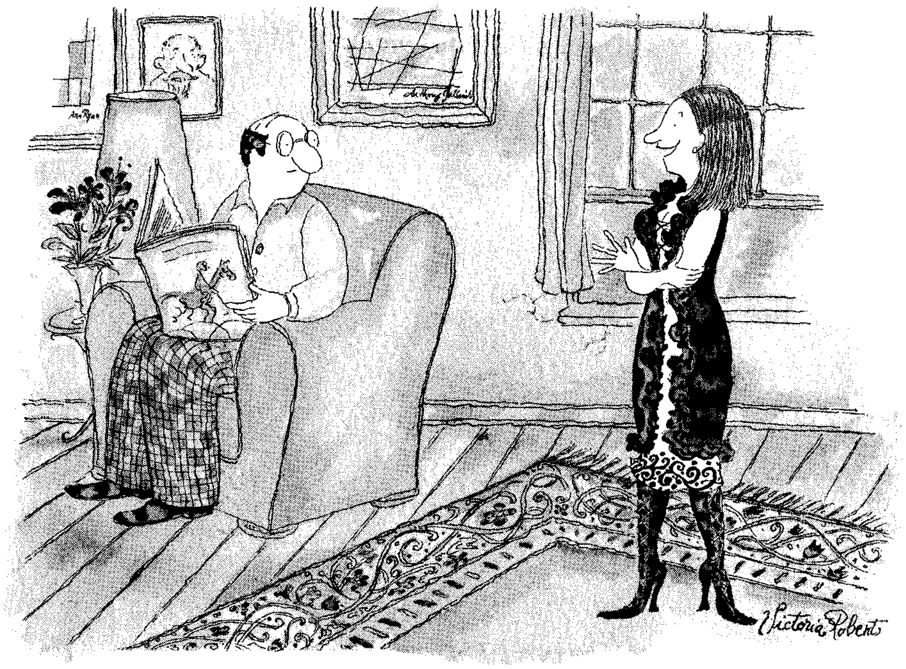
"She was a big Brewer broad," he decides, "who would put out for anybody."

"Not those three months," Janice says. "As I remember, Harry moved in. It was a kind of honeymoon. Me pregnant with poor little Becky, and my husband was on his honeymoon." Putting it like that makes her furious, almost to tears. Ronnie is right, of course. The girl is an alien invader, to be repelled.

"I for*bid*," Ronnie says, putting down his fork and forgetting the amount of chicken salad in his mouth, "any-



"I was just trying to brush him back."



"Are all Brits bisexual, or just the ones who publish their diaries?"

need to discuss this before Nelson comes home!"

Harry always thought Ronnie was terribly obtuse—called him an enforcer, a deliberate-foul artist—but Janice doesn't find him obtuse so much as on occasion having a quality of *being in the way*, of not letting anything just glide past even if he doesn't absolutely agree with every detail. He was an insurance salesman before Schuylkill Mutual retired him, and has sat in too many living rooms refusing to leave until the man of the house sees the necessity of buying insurance.

"O.K.," he says in his plodding, relentless voice, "the point is Ruth did a lot of screwing back then—who's to say it was Hotshot that knocked her up? Did the girl look like him?"

She tries to be honest. "It's awful to say this, but I've forgotten exactly what Harry looked like. There was something about her, a kind of, I don't know, pale glow, and a way she couldn't quite sit still, I thought."

"You thought. You'll have to do better than that before you owe her anything."

"She didn't say I did owe her anything. What she did say was her mother told her to come see us because otherwise she'd be alone in the world."

"We're all alone in the world, it turns out," he says. Janice doesn't know quite what he means but it hurts. Harry may have felt it but he would never have said that to her. She wonders sometimes if Ronnie married her just to score somehow on Harry. His lashless, pink-lidded eyes shift in embarrassment past her face, which she knows looks shocked, toward the clock on the microwave, worried about dinner or Nelson arriving home. He tells her, "There'll be money in it at the end, believe me, if you have anything more to do with this bimbo."

"She works as a nurse, and her mother must have left her something, there was all that money from selling the farm."

"I bet. How'd you leave it in the end?"

"We'd get in touch with her. She won't with us."

"Good. Don't. To me, it smells like a scam."

"But I was *here*. When you were a child, did your parents ever tell you the stranger at the door might be an angel in disguise?"

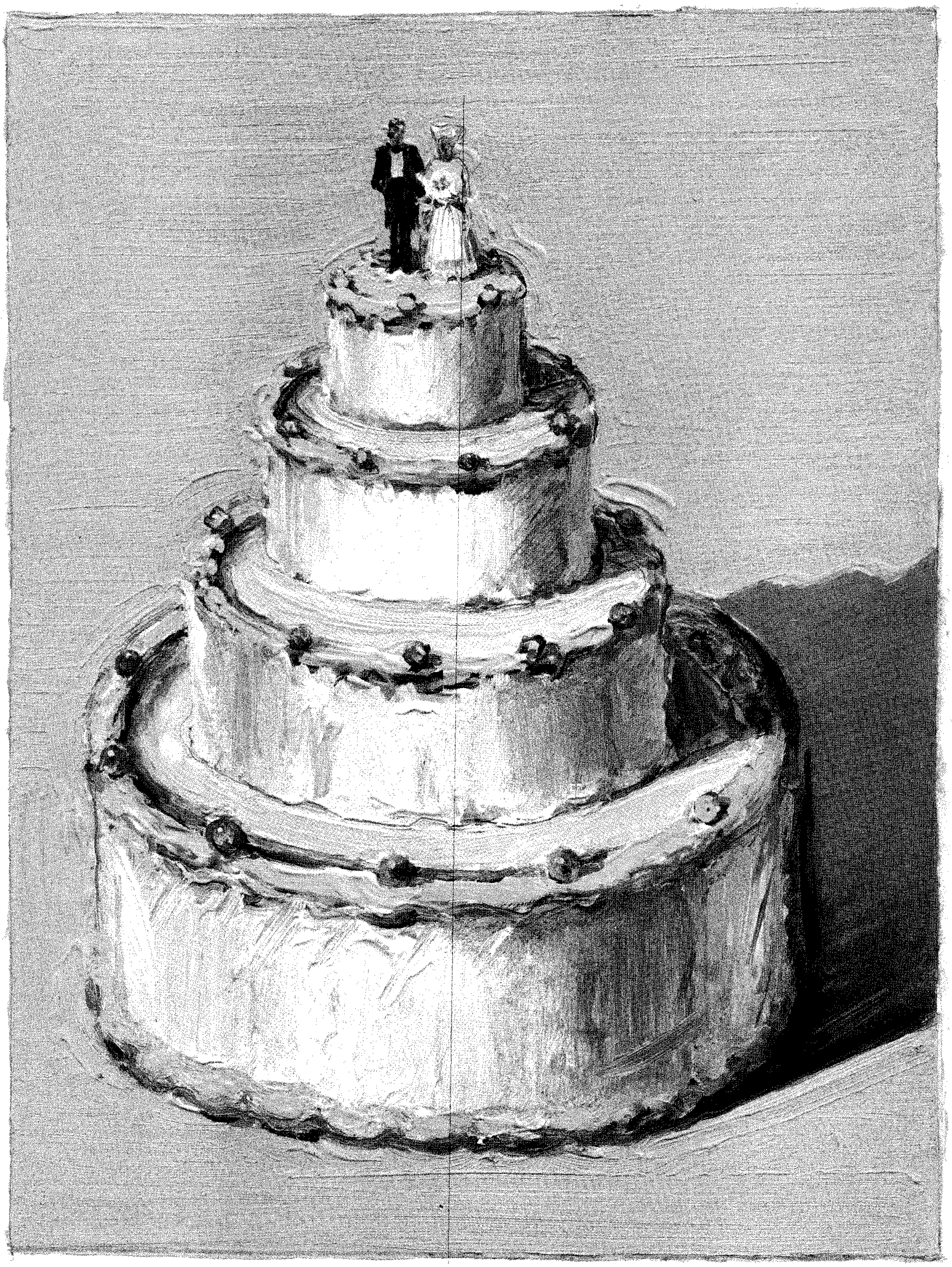
"No," he says. "They never said that. They said the person at the door probably wants to pull a fast one. Suppose you concede that old Fuckbunny *was* her dad, she may figure she can sue us for hundreds of thousands in back child support."

Janice takes a step forward to touch his shoulder and to offer herself to be touched. "Ronnie honey, why are you so rude about Harry? He's dead. He can't bother us now."

"He bothers me. He screwed my wife. Twice he screwed my wife," he adds, meaning Thelma when she and Harry had their affair, and Janice now, as a softening joke, and she rests her body against his, its comforting blocky golf-sweaty hereness. His hands find their habitual places on her. She would never have believed in her teens what an innocent homely comfort it could be, after sixty, to have your bottom groped. He weighs her two buttocks as if they are precious. It occurs to her they should do more in bed, while they're still alive. But at their age there is so much to do, all these errands going nowhere, all these little commitments.

Footsteps sound on the front porch. Guiltily they break apart in the kitchen. Nelson sees that something has been up, his stepfather has been pawing his mother. To cover her embarrassment she tells him, Ronnie interrupting to correct where she tells it differently the second time, about the strange girl's—woman's—visit this morning.

Nelson's deep-socketed, distrustful eyes dart back and forth as he listens. Listening is part of what he does for a living, and he lets them talk while he fishes a Coors from the refrigerator. He is forty-two. He has put on weight, but nothing like his father did; Nelson learned the lesson there. That's why he likes Japanese noodles. His thinning hair, dark like his mother's but with his father's fineness—Harry's blond hair, drying after it was combed, would just lift off his head—is cut so short his skull and face are naked in their angles, like a convict's. He wears a kind of social worker's uniform—khaki pants and a white shirt with necktie but no jacket. A jacket would overstate the distance between him and the clients at the Fresh Start Adult Day Treatment Center at Elm and Eighth Streets. The clean shirt and tie establish his authority, as one of those who guard the gates of Medicare and Medicaid, which compensate the day-treatment centers that have arisen to replace the Gothic institutions that used to house what were once called the insane. His title is mental-health counsellor. His qualifications are a bachelor's degree (major: geography) awarded by Kent State in Ohio and a counsel-



Painting by Wayne Thiebaud.

FICTION

NELSON AND ANNABELLE

The two children of Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom meet at last.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

As Janice hopes, Ronnie comes home before Nelson, so they can develop a position, which Nelson is bound to oppose. "I won three bucks and only hit two duck hooks off the tee. On the seventeenth I sank a putt you wouldn't believe," Ronnie says, having come in through the back door to put his golf clubs and clothes in the tidy closet he made last winter, sending plaster dust flying through the house. He is, unlike her first husband, a man of home projects. The little storage space smells now of him, of his sweat on the club handles, in the spikeless shoes, even the sour inside of the hats he wears. Each hat hangs on its own hook, and there is one where the glove hangs, like a bat drying out, upside down. She likes Ronnie's neatness, but on the other hand it slightly intimidates her, the same as with her mother years ago. He moves with a certain sluggish pained quality, limping back into the kitchen. "How was bridge?" he asks politely. She wonders if there is always, in second marriages, a little stiffness, a certain considerate wariness.

"I kept wondering why I was playing," Janice tells him. "I did something that irritated Doris terribly, let her sit with a take-out double or something. She's getting old and crabby. Deet spoils her."

"What's for dinner? Did you remember to defrost anything?" Ronnie has learned what questions to ask. Thelma, his first wife, was a clever cook and a zealous housekeeper, along with all else she did, teaching school and raising three boys. Janice at first had tried to give Ronnie real meals, but something always dried out or was underdone, and her attempts at seasoning, though she thought she had followed the recipe exactly, miscarried into a funny suspicious taste. With the yuppifying of greater Brewer, all these vague industries coming in that didn't make anything you could handle or drive or put in a box, really—"the information industry," they said—there were more and more pleasant and not very expensive restaurants to eat out at, you didn't have to go downtown anymore, as Daddy and Mother would, for a little celebration. Otherwise the supermarkets sold wonderful frozen meals and sealed salads.

"Well, I forgot, if truth be known," Janice confesses. "I just got back five minutes ago. I've been doing so much else, and this morning, what a shock, Ronnie, this girl shows up at the door—"

Ronnie is not listening, he is opening the refrigerator door and peering in. "There's still some chicken salad from two nights ago, I don't suppose it's turned yet. And those Japanese noodles Nelson likes. Oh, yeah, and way back behind the wilted lettuce a container of three-bean salad we never got to—should it have that cloudy look? I guess we can make do." He moves to the counter to turn on the Sony. "Lemme just catch the news, for the weather. The car radio said it's going to rain tomorrow, I'll believe it when I see it."

"Ronnie, *please* don't turn on TV. Pay attention, this is serious. This girl—'woman' I should say, Nelson's age more or less—rang the doorbell, which still needs fixing by the way, and said she was Harry's daughter. Her mother died this summer and told her before she died. Ruth sicced her on us."

Now she does have Ronnie's attention. He has lost thirty pounds since Janice first knew him, and he has that deflated, slumped look of people you remember as fatter. His hair, which was kinky and brass-colored, is almost all gone, even over his ears, so they stick out as rubbery red flesh. His pale eyelashes are almost invisible now, which makes his eyelids look pink and rubbed. Ronnie, though Harry always spoke of him as a crude plug-ugly, in fact has thin babyish skin that makes physical contact with him a little silky surprise, which is something Harry couldn't have known. Now the man fastens on what to Janice had been the least interesting of the morning's revelations. "So Ruth Leonard is dead," he says.

Janice remembers that Ronnie knew this Ruth back in the period when Harry did, that he had fucked her in fact, which Harry always resented, which seemed strange to Janice, since in this period a lot of people evidently had. Janice had never met Ruth, but there had been this slutty kind of girl in high school: from bad families on the lower side of town usually, no special looks, overweight and quiet in class, they had existed even under Eisenhower, when everybody was supposed to be so pure. She cannot believe a forty-year-old fuck could mean much to Ronnie, but from the stunned, slumped way he stands there in his sweated-up knit polo shirt and plaid golf pants she sees it does. "On that farm of hers," he says. "The drought killed her." He is trying to joke away that trance men get into trying to remember what it was like entering a certain woman's space. Now that space is nowhere on earth, and he will never get back into it.

"Wake up, honey. According to the girl she hadn't lived on the farm for years, she lived in Brewer with this daughter and worked for some shady investments outfit in that glass building across from where Kroll's used to be. Anyway, why do you care?"

"I don't, much. It was Rabbit that got stuck on her. To me she was just a hooer. What proof did this girl have that she was his kid?"

"None—just a lot of confusing facts only she would know, about how her mother lied to her about when she and this man Byer were married so it would seem he was the father instead of somebody earlier. There's more of that went on than we think, back before abortions were easy."

"They keep trying to make them less easy, in this state."

"Ronnie, that's not the *point*—we

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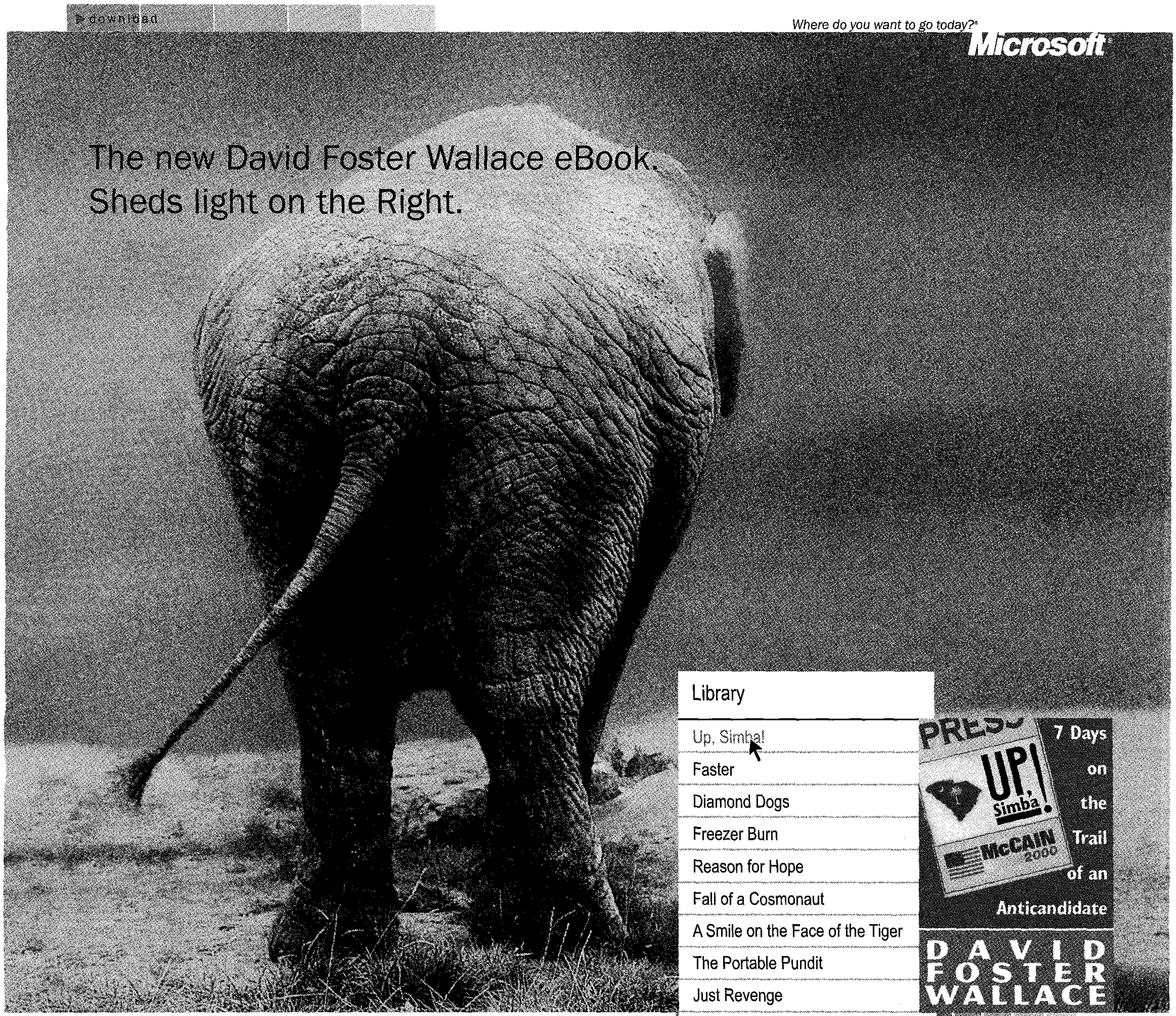
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or the knowledge. But when we write or listen or read or play we relive the experience of making the journey from chaos to order, and that feeds us, reminds us, heartens us, gives us courage to face all the journeys where there is no such promise. And that's why Bach's suites are stories." Salzman smiled. "And so, to the Gigue!"

In the days after Salzman's performance at the L.A. library, I reread "The Soloist," and I was struck by its first lines:

> This morning I read an article suggesting that Saint Theresa of Avila, a sixteenth-century Spanish mystic noted for her ecstatic visions, suffered from a neurological disorder known to cause hallucinations.

It turns out that Salzman was being haunted by the idea behind "Lying Awake" long before he started it. And, more confounding, the insights that Salzman's cellist protagonist manages to struggle his way toward—the saving epiphanies that rain down like grace upon him at the novel's end—were the very sort that Salzman himself could have benefitted from, if only he'd been able to recall them and to marshal them:

> On that day I began to have a different idea about why I couldn't play onstage anymore. I'd always assumed it had to do with my sense of pitch, because that was certainly what I'd noticed had changed. I couldn't hold onto the dead center of notes anymore because my pitch had become too sensitive; my fingers couldn't keep the notes pure enough. It felt like trying to split hairs with a butter knife.

"And then you'll want to take the No. 2 or 3 train to right here behind this very accommodating passive-aggressive woman's head."

But now the aging wunderkind starts to think that maybe the problem never had anything to do with his ear; that, rather, it had to do with his very ambition toward perfection.

> For all practical purposes [I] forgot that absolute intonation does not exist. As my mind focused on the impossible goal of achieving pure intonation, I became unable to feel the music.

He starts to understand that "you cannot make great music happen; you can only *prepare* yourself for it to happen." And that, in a sense, is the saving insight that finally descended like grace upon Salzman at that writer's colony—and descends in the end on the protagonist of the book he created there, although it descends on the two of them in opposite ways. The paradox is that succeeding to write is the grace that falls on Salzman, even as what he writes *about* is the seeming evaporation of that capacity in Sister John:

> A group had formed at the Blessed Virgin's shrine to pay respects. Mother Emmanuel left to join them, but Sister John stayed behind to finish clearing the fountain. When she got the water flowing properly, she stepped back, took her bell out of her pocket, and rang it. The sound cheered her, then vanished into the deep blue air, which seemed to go on forever.

The key word in that passage, which concludes the book, is "seemed." The deep-blue air *seems* to go on forever, in contrast to the blinding certainty that consumed Sister John in the midst of those fever spikes of transcendence with which the book began: She *could* see forever, and everywhere she looked she saw God's love.

It may just be that seeming is the human portion—the transcendent grace, a knowledge that is damnably difficult to attain and even more difficult to sustain. It is something that artists—and not only artists—seem to learn and forget all over again as they struggle to return to where they started. The irony here is that the moment Salzman (and his protagonist, Sister John) realized the futility and the vanity of seeking perfection was the moment that Salzman was at last able to achieve something approaching a perfect little novel. ♦

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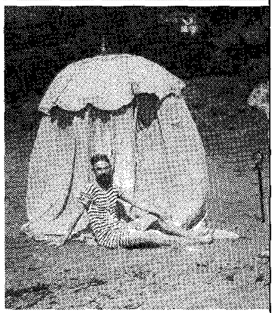

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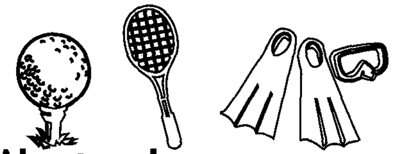

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in effect proclaims, 'Eureka! We're done!' I had my cello with me there in the cabin, which was a perfect place to be playing Bach: those reverberant wood walls. And I took to playing it every day, and it was while playing that suddenly I had this truly astonishing insight.

"The thing is, I'm agnostic. I was raised in a non-religious family. Before I started the book, pretty much all I knew about Christianity was what I'd learned from Linus on 'A Charlie Brown Christmas.' My character had dedicated her life to living by faith, not reason. Whereas, of course, I live by reason. I'd assumed that such a character would be quite a stretch for me, but that was all right: a good writer welcomes that kind of gulf."

But it turned out that it wasn't that much of a stretch after all, he went on. The artistic wager—the commitment to devote ever-lengthening years of one's life, say, to the production of a novel; the conviction that such a commitment will make any sort of difference to anyone else—is manifestly unreasonable. "I take it on faith that art is worthwhile. I go on because I believe it's the right thing to do, not because I know it is.

"Suddenly, sitting there in my cabin, I realized that all along I'd been living my nun's life myself. And, once I saw that, the book wrote itself in five weeks, with me in a state that I can only describe as euphoric. *I* was the one the other artists wanted to kill. The words were coming to me with labels attached: 'Put me next to him.' And, when it was done, the way I felt about that book made everything that had come before worthwhile: they were no longer six years of sorry-ass bungling but, rather, now I could see them all as a purposeful journey toward . . . toward . . . well, I don't know, I suppose toward a new level of obscurity and financial crisis, but toward a new level of understanding as well.

"For me, art and music are alike in that they are about creating dissonance and then feeling compelled from within to resolve it. Bach literally could not stand leaving a dissonant harmony unresolved. In ordinary life, we face dissonances every day which we can't resolve—there's not enough time, we don't have the authority or the influence

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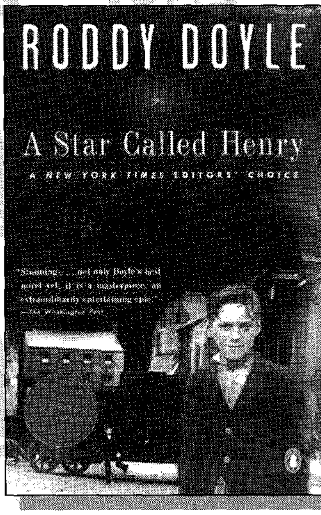

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I, MAY I REST IN PEACE

I, may I rest in peace—I, who am still living, say,
May I have peace in the rest of my life.
I want peace right now while I'm still alive.
I don't want to wait like that pious man who wished for one leg
of the golden chair of Paradise, I want a four-legged chair
right here, a plain wooden chair. I want the rest of my peace now.
I have lived out my life in wars of every kind: battles without
and within, close combat, face-to-face, the faces always
my own, my lover-face, my enemy-face.
Wars with the old weapons—sticks and stones, blunt axe, words,
dull ripping knife, love and hate,
and wars with newfangled weapons—machine gun, missile,
words, land mines exploding, love and hate.
I don't want to fulfill my parents' prophecy that life is war.
I want peace with all my body and all my soul.
Rest me in peace.

—*Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000)*
(Translated, from the Hebrew, by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld.)

tirely on the nun's question: had hers been an authentic relationship with God, or was it, rather, solely with her own longing to be holy? And the next year was a good year: no tinfoil skirt, no car. And, when it was done, I felt vindicated. I had passed my own test; I myself had stuck it out; I was an artist after all. I completed a manuscript, and last summer, when I performed a first version of this talk at a writers' conference in Sun Valley, I was able to report that I'd learned what writing's all about. The book was done, and it was good. Meanwhile, I'd sent the manuscript off to my editor, and a few weeks later I called her up and I asked her, all expectant, how she liked it, and she said, 'I missed the doctor.' But then I reread the book myself, and I fell completely apart: because the thing was, it did suck. I had written a bad book. And I was destroyed.

"Anyway, that October I'd been scheduled to spend five weeks at one of those New England artists' retreats where you get your own cabin and everything is geared toward fertile solitude—you know, you don't even report for lunch, they tiptoe up and leave a picnic basket on your porch so you don't have a second of distraction. I'd been imagining that, finished with my nun book, I'd be starting a new project: I had no idea what I was going to do. But now I was afraid I'd become like Jack Nicholson in 'The Shining.' There'd be all those happy artists prancing through the forests with their picnic baskets, and they were all going to have to die, one by one.

"But my wife, my wise, wise wife—and can you imagine what I'd been putting her through all those years?—she told me that a change of scenery would be good. And so I went, though without any particular intention of writing: that book had hurt me enough. I just wanted to exist as if in a kind of Zen retreat.

"And you know what? It was like waking from a bad dream. All of a sudden, everything was like a gift: the fall colors, the sounds, the little homemade cookies in the picnic baskets. But mainly the removal of all the reminders of art as a profession, as a way of making money or gaining a reputation and the like. Rather, here I was in a community of people who seemed dedicated to art almost like a sacred pursuit. And the irony was not lost on me that I was now living essentially like a Carmelite nun."

He smiled, and reached for his bow. "The Bourrée." After he completed that passage, he hardly paused before declaring, "Which brings us to the last movement, the Gigue, which of God. They have something in common. Sparks fly. This attraction develops and they have to decide what to do. In the end, they decide to go their separate ways, but both are changed for the better by the experience.

"What a great idea! It'll be like a cross between the movie 'Witness' and the movie 'Awakenings,' my people will get in touch with Robin Williams's people, we'll package it all with Winona Ryder as the nun, I'll make so much money that I'll have medical benefits, a pension plan, an investment portfolio. I'll throw a party for the twenty best young writers in America, and it'll be like the prom scene in 'Carrie'!" He was beside himself. He marshalled his bow once again: "The Courante."

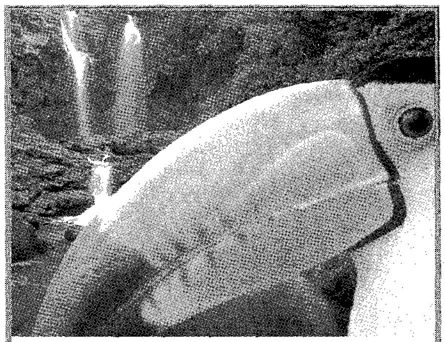
Setting aside his bow at the end of that movement, which he had indeed raced through with almost reckless gusto, Salzman said gravely, "And now comes the slow movement, the Sarabande, the center of emotional gravity of the entire piece. If I had to give it a title, I'd call it 'Facing the Consequences of Hubris.' But still in C major, and C major is an optimistic key, so it's not about complete defeat, at least not yet." He took a deep breath. "I spent the next five years writing my surefire best-seller. Five years, and it was the most terrible experience of my life. I could not get my characters to act like real people. I couldn't get them to talk like real people. Hell, I couldn't even get them through doors: 'Her hand reached toward the handle of the door.' . . . 'Her hand extended toward the oaken knob of her' . . . No no. Jeesh. By the third year, my concentration was so shot that any sound distracted me and just drove me crazy, so I took to wearing a huge towel wrapped around my head and stereo earphones on top of the towel, and that worked except that I have two cats, and they liked to sit on my lap when I worked, which distracted me. And so I made a tinfoil skirt, because cats don't like tinfoil. I wore that outfit every day, until one day I saw the gas-meter reader hiding behind a tree outside, staring in at me, and that distracted me even more. So I finally moved to the one place where I felt so trapped that the only way I could get out was through writing, and that was the passenger seat of my car, out in the driveway, in which I proceeded to pretty much ensconce myself for a whole year. Now, I drive an old station wagon with a moon roof, and one of the cats was still so angry about the tinfoil skirt—and now, on top of that, the move outside—that every day she would walk out, clamber up the hood and up the windshield, and plant herself squat squarely in the middle of the moon roof. And I tell you that the view from where I sat was the perfect metaphor for what I was going through: writing that novel, I was just staring up a cat's ass.

"Anyway, finally I finished, and all I felt was exhaustion, there was no joy. But I thought that maybe others, reading my manuscript and not knowing what had happened, would say, 'It's beautiful, it was worth it.' So I sent it out, and the response came back, well, mixed. My friends said they liked it, but they more or less knew that was a requirement of the job. My editor back in New York sent me thirty pages of notes, and they were severe criticisms. I remember one sentence in particular: 'Mark, we need to talk about main characters.' My agent said, 'I think this belonged in the oven a little longer.' People looked at me with *pity*.

"I was like the literary equivalent of a beached whale. I couldn't even look at a sentence without my eyes crossing. I thought about abandoning the project. But what was I going to do if I just scuttled it? Who was to say that I wouldn't just hit the same wall with my next effort? And what if it was *that* close to working and I just needed to push myself a little further? Hell, the Unabomber had published more than I had over the past five years. At least he was getting something out there. I decided I had to go on somehow, and all I could think of was throwing it all out and starting from scratch." Salzman seemed to tremble palpably at the memory of the experience as he reached once more for his bow: "The Sarabande."

The music was indeed lugubrious, almost harrowing. "So," he resumed, when it was over. "On to the fifth movement, the Bourrée, which is in effect two short pieces, the first in C major, the second a dark shift into C minor, and then the first played all over again, C major, but transformed by the experience of having passed through the other.

"The problem was obvious: the love story never belonged there. I had to return to my first impulse and focus en-



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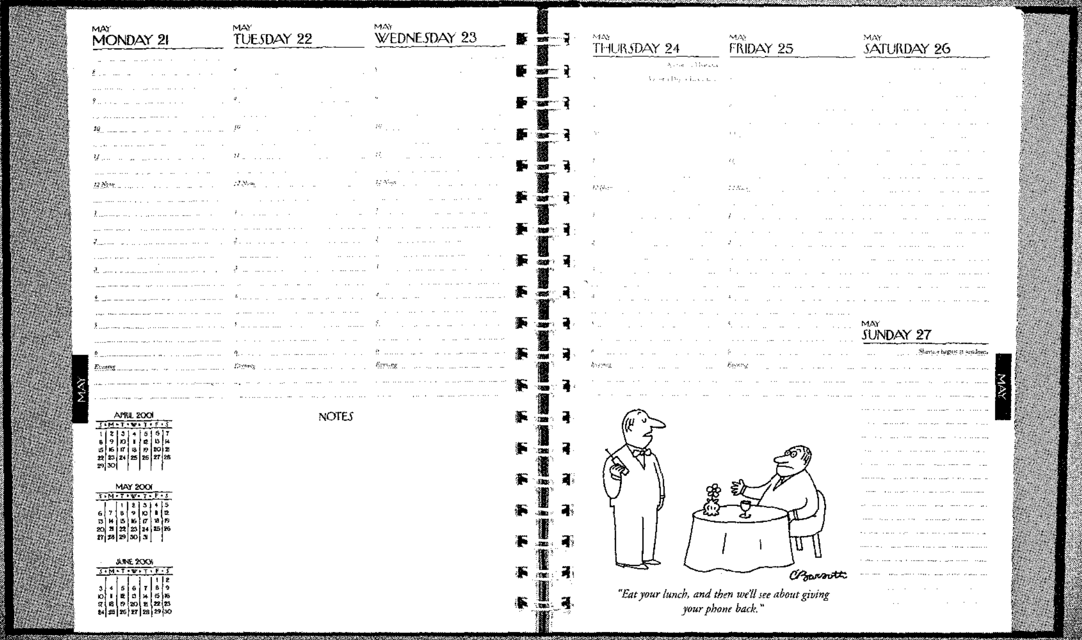
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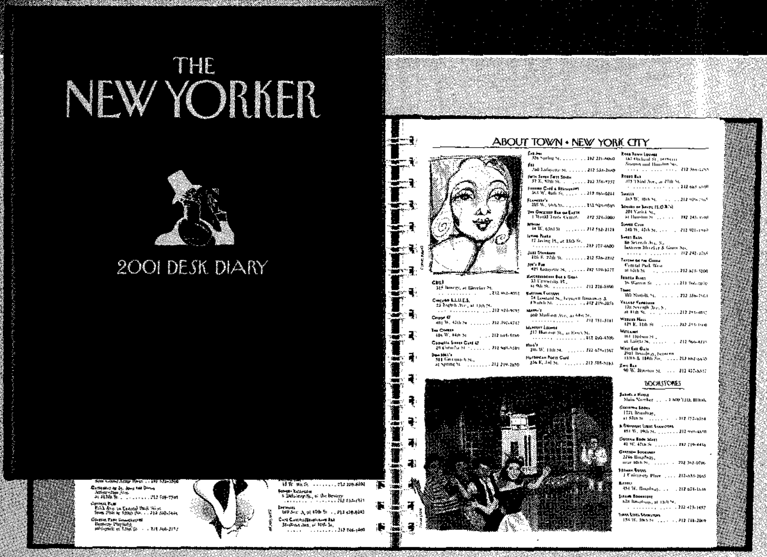
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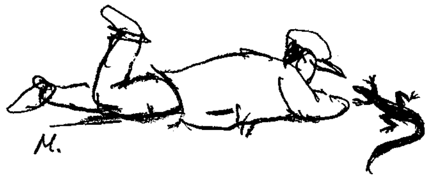
course, but then another as well, the narrative of the genesis of my most recent novel, from its original conception to the final version." He'd be performing Bach's Third Suite, he explained, which, like the others, consisted of six movements; similarly, the story of his novel's evolution broke into six segments.

Before proceeding, Salzman assured his audience that he wasn't going to be making any great claims for his musical competence. He went through some of the same points he'd gone over with me about the history of his vocation as a cellist, invoking George Bernard Shaw's observation that "Hell is full of musical amateurs: music is the brandy of the damned." He then recounted how he'd been reading a tale by the neurologist Oliver Sacks about an Italian immigrant whose temporal-lobe epilepsy had resulted in visions of his boyhood village so vivid that he'd felt compelled to render them as paintings. Sacks had pointed out that such epilepsies are sometimes characterized by an intensification of emotional life and a general sense of illumination and faith. "And I found myself thinking, Imagine if someone already committed to religious life were to develop such a disorder. Wouldn't she interpret its symptoms as a confirmation of her vocation? And let's up the stakes: Let's say that under the spell of such seizures she starts writing poems, and they start getting published, and they start selling, so much that the royalties save her convent from bankruptcy. A lot of these convents are hanging by their fingernails. Only there are problems, of course, not the least of which is the jealousy of her fellow-nuns. Furthermore, if the condition goes untreated, it could get worse. On the other hand, if these are valid mystical experiences and she gets an operation to have the disorder treated, she might be giving up graces of God just in order to improve her health. How would she experience this news? And what would she do?"

Salzman picked up his cello and sat down. Taking the bow, he smiled broadly and announced, "The Prelude!" He momentarily pulled the bow aside, and added, exultantly, "Isn't that a great idea for a novel?" before launching into the piece with robust self-confidence. As he played, I was reminded of a scene in "The Soloist" in which the protagonist recalls hearing of a scuba diver who grabs a passing whale by its fin and finds being pulled along by such a creature to be the most incredible experience of his life. Salzman's protagonist adds that it can't have been that different from playing onstage.



After the Prelude, Salzman said that the next movement was called an allemande and was more tentative, reflective, and searching in tone. "Questions stumbling toward answers" was how he put it—"not unlike what I myself was going through in the months after my first inspiration. For example, what sort of person was this nun? How old was she? What made her first decide to join the order? And how early had her disorder kicked in? And then, as well, other sorts of questions, like: Why had my last three books sold so few copies? Why was I so conspicuously absent from *The New Yorker's* 'twenty best young fiction writers in America' issue last year? What was that all about? I mean, really, was I just a 'nichey' writer, as mediocre a writer as I was a cellist? And, more to the point, my last protagonist had been impotent and this one was celibate: why didn't my characters *ever have sex*? . . . But seriously, I took to wondering, how could I make this book more interesting, more . . . you know . . . more *commercial*?" He gazed out at the audience for two beats, longingly, searchingly, before picking up his bow once again and announcing, "The Allemande."

When that movement ended, Salzman declared, "Now comes the Courante, which is confident, pleased with itself, reckless even, but you get the sense that it's headed for danger, like those bubbly teen-agers in all those horror movies. Because the thing is, then I had an idea: What if my nun falls in love with her neurologist? Let's say he's one of those cold doctors who don't relate well to patients. Maybe he's mourning the loss of the identical twin brother with whom he'd shared such a close identity; she is mourning the imminent loss of her sense of the presence

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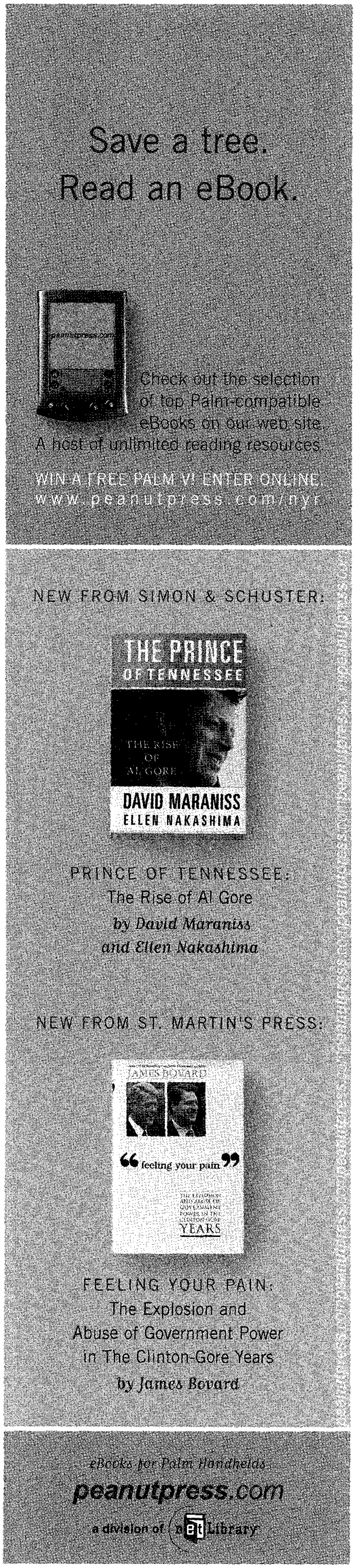

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the age of seventeen"—Salzman interrupted himself, laughing. "I love it when people come up and ask, 'Where do you get your ideas for your novels?' Anyway, suddenly it was as if this character had become hypersensitive to pitch, or his sense of tonal confidence had broken up, and he was unable to continue concertizing. He'd fallen away into an empty, deracinated life of teaching, and now he was middle-aged, and, what with one plot turn and another, he finds himself given charge of this little Korean boy, a phenomenal cello prodigy, and all these feelings start welling up in him.

"As I was coming to the end of the book, I realized how badly I wanted this cellist to be able to enjoy playing once again—not as a concert soloist but just as someone who loves playing for the sake of the music, who strives for the ideal that music represents but isn't destroyed by failure to reach that ideal. And as I was writing that scene I had the stereo playing in the background, and on came Bach's Fifth Suite, the one that Yo-Yo Ma had been playing the day he tore through the hull of my ship and sent me to the bottom of the ocean. I was describing this moment when the cellist, alone, drags the bow across the strings, just to hear the music come alive, and how it does come alive for him, and how now when he makes mistakes he no longer cares, he doesn't think of them as a crime against music but, rather, as an act of nature, like the random cracks that show up in those Oriental teacups everybody's always raving about.

"After I'd completed that scene, I remember thinking, If I can do that for him, why not for me? So I rented a cello—my own was still back in Connecticut in deep storage—and I tried acting out the scene I'd just written, and it was wonderful. That was ten years ago, and I've been playing every day since, and I can honestly say that nowadays, playing, I feel the way Yo-Yo looked. How I sound is an entirely different matter."

I'd come out to L.A. because I'd heard that Salzman had recently started offering a performance piece—cello and narrative—that relayed the saga of the composition of his new novel, set to a score by Bach. There was to be a performance that very afternoon in the Mark Taper Auditorium of the L.A. Central Library.

I hurried downtown and was comfortably in place when Salzman came onto the stage, cello in tow, wearing a gray T-shirt and casual black pants, relaxed, guffawing at the audience's friendly reception, waving to longtime pals scattered in the seats. Laying the cello on its side, for the moment, but declining as yet to take his seat beside it, he launched into his talk.

"Bach wrote six suites for unaccompanied cello," he began. "They were nearly lost—in fact, the autograph manuscript was never found, and only a few copies, handwritten by his wife, managed to make it through. Once rediscovered, for the longest time they were simply ignored, mistaken for exercise études. The story goes that at the age of thirteen the prodigy Pablo Casals was rummaging around in a secondhand shop in Barcelona, and he found a dusty copy of these pieces he'd never heard of; he bought them, took them home, studied them, and was later to describe the experience as the greatest revelation of his life. He worked at them every day for twelve years until he had the courage to play them publicly, and then he seemed to never stop performing them, and with absolutely intimidating authority. These pieces have become to cellists what Shakespeare's plays are to actors, or Rembrandt's painting to painters: the foundation of the repertoire, the music we can forever return to and never exhaust." (In "The Soloist," the boyhood mentor of Salzman's protagonist asserts "that Bach's musical inspiration was divine in origin, and that to play Bach properly was an act of religious devotion.")

Salzman went on to suggest that he had developed a theory as to why these pieces become so meaningful to cellists. "Because, you see," he said, "I believe these pieces function as stories—not specific stories. I don't mean, for instance, that the Second Suite is about the birth of Bach's twenty-third son, or anything like that. No, I think that when we play them our emotions take a journey that so closely resembles a narrative journey that I believe there's got to be a relationship between the two. And I want to illustrate this point by taking you on two parallel journeys—the musical one, of

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sense the sobriety, the utter focus, the intense concentration—the barely concealed terror. And I don't even mean that as a criticism: the technical level expected of performers nowadays is so insanely high that you'd be crazy if you weren't terrified. Yo-Yo, by contrast, came out like this—totally relaxed, guffawing, almost slap-happy, casually waving to friends in the audience, you know, 'Oh wow, great, what are you doing here?' Completely, but completely, unfazed.

"And then he started to play. Bach—the fifth suite for unaccompanied cello. And his playing was so beautiful, so original, so intelligent, so effortless that by the end of the first movement I knew my cello career was over. I kid you not. People talk about Yo-Yo Ma's superhuman technique. Let me tell you: superhuman technique is only the tip of the Yo-Yo iceberg. What really sank my ship was how much he was obviously enjoying himself: he was lost in the music, freed by it, speaking through it, in love with it. He was enjoying himself as much playing as most of the rest of us do when we're listening, and as I myself never did when playing, not to speak of practicing.

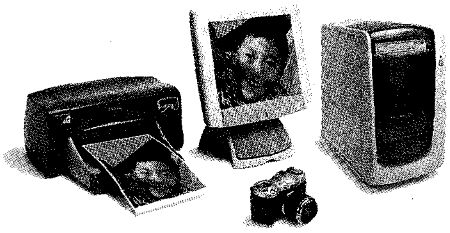
"When I heard Yo-Yo play, I suddenly realized that I wasn't just inadequate—I wasn't even making music. I was training to be a showoff, that's all. My playing was to true music what a résumé is to a piece of real writing. My true calling, I realized, was not the cello, never had been. My true calling was to teach kung fu. So I put the cello into deep storage, and, reporting to Yale, I majored in Chinese."

Salzman excelled at Chinese. In 1982, just out of college, he travelled to Changsha, the remote capital of Hunan Province—an unusual undertaking for an American in those early days of the Communist thaw—to teach English at a medical college and, more to the point, to study Chinese martial arts at their very headwaters. Returning to New Haven two years later, he set about composing a memoir of the experience, the narrative that became "Iron & Silk," his first book. (During this period, he met Jessica Yu, a beautiful and self-assured Yale sophomore, who was the daughter of a Shanghai-born oncologist. Somehow, their early relationship survived both her relative obliviousness of her Chinese origins and his disconcerting habit of smashing his bare fist into a steel plate a thousand times a day as part of a conditioning ritual.)

"Iron & Silk," which was published in 1986, proved to be a considerable success, and, indeed, had something of a Holden Caulfieldesque popularity on college campuses. It was later the basis for an ill-conceived movie, starring Salzman himself, filmed in mainland China. (The shoot ended on June 3, 1989, the eve of the Tiananmen Square massacre.) One would have no conceivable reason to look for that film nowadays except that it allows one to witness Salzman in full martial ecstasy: a startling vision.

Once Jessica had graduated from Yale, the couple moved to her home haunts, in the San Francisco Bay area, where Salzman wrote a novel, "The Laughing Sutra," a magic-realist picaresque that traces the adventures of a Chinese orphan and his sidekick, a mysterious two-thousand-year-old knightly warrior. The Salzmans presently transplanted themselves to Los Angeles, and Jessica started making independent documentary films. A few years later, she won an Academy Award for a short-subject documentary, "Breathing Lessons," about a writer who spent most of his life in an iron lung. (At that year's televised ceremonies, Jessica, sheathed in a borrowed strapless gold-embroidered black Mary McFadden dress and draped in Harry Winston jewels, began her acceptance speech with the observation "You know you've entered new territory when your outfit costs more than your film.") Mark, meanwhile, had begun work on his second novel, "The Soloist."

"So here I was," Salzman resumed. "This was maybe fifteen years since I'd more or less abandoned the cello, and I was finding myself writing this novel about an embittered failed wunderkind, a cello prodigy whose career had suddenly and mysteriously come undone at



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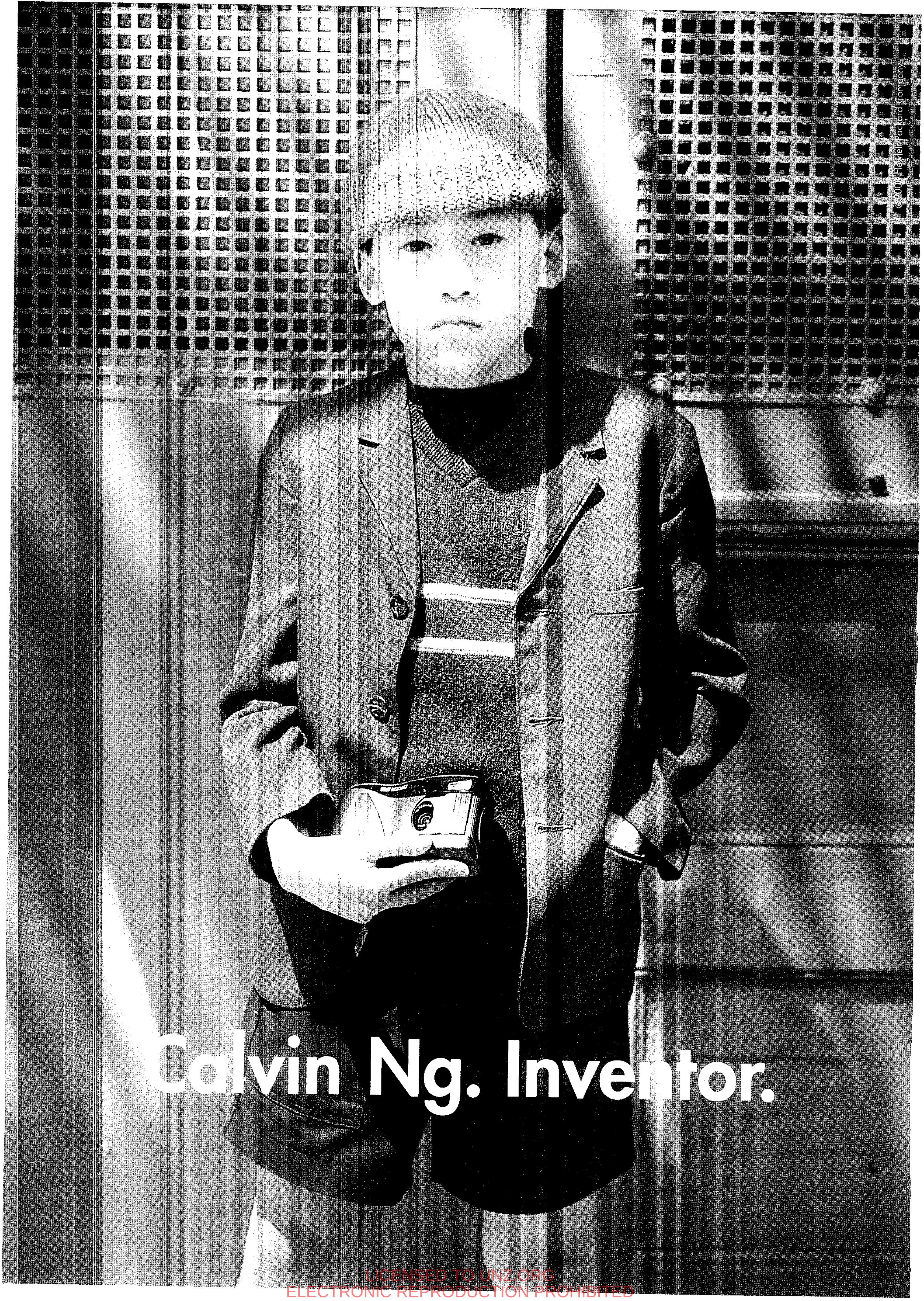
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almost more than she can bear. After such knowledge, what forgiveness—and what grace?

This, then, is the vocational crisis, the existential crux, to which Salzman's narrative brings his protagonist, the shadings of which he only now starts to draw out at length—heartrendingly—like a master cellist.

A master cellist, as it happens, is what Salzman himself once seemed on the way to becoming. We were talking about that alternative life one morning recently as we sat out on the yucca-shaded back porch of a wood-and-stucco bungalow he shares with his wife, the documentary filmmaker Jessica Yu, in the chaparral foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Salzman is unlike anything you would have expected if "Lying Awake" were the only one of his books you ever read. (On the other hand, he's exactly like what you would have expected had you encountered only his two books of memoir, "Iron & Silk" and "Lost in Place.") He's neither Catholic nor particularly religious in any conventional sense—and he isn't a bit dour. He's spry and mischievous: a human gleam. He's powerfully built (if somewhat on the slight side), with a mime's bearing. He shambles about with a sort of lope, and is subject to explosions of glee. Yet, at heart, he's a mournful fatalist, which is to say that he is truly the son of the father to whom he dedicated his second book, "Lost in Place," a memoir of "Growing Up Absurd in Suburbia," in the following terms:

> For Joseph Arthur Salzman, artist, astronomer, social worker, beloved father and good natured pessimist, whose reaction to this book was to say that he enjoyed it, but felt that my portrayal of him was inaccurate.I put him, he complained, in an excessively positive light.

Salzman's mother, Martha, on the other hand, has a sunny disposition. Formerly both a concert pianist and a concert oboist, she later became a harpsichordist and teacher. It was from her side that Mark's love of music flowed, though not, as it happens, immediately. "I started with the violin, and then piano, but neither of them really took," he now recalled. "Then, one evening, my parents dragged me to a cello recital—I was about seven at the time—and from the moment the young player walked onto the stage with that instrument I was captivated, I was enthralled. I mean, the shape of it, the color, the varnish like the glaze on a caramel custard. And for a second, as the guy was setting up, I got a peek at the far side of the instrument, and it was like a tiger's back, all gloriously striated; and the way he then held the thing, as if he were riding a tiger, holding it by the neck and drawing the music out of it—and the sound! My God, I was completely hooked."

For the next ten years, Salzman devoted himself to the cello—well, not entirely. It turned out that he, too, was torn between two passions. Only, in his case, as readers of "Lost in Place" know, the other consuming enthusiasm of his adolescence was kung fu: he established an incense-reeking shrine in his parents' basement, in Ridgefield, Connecticut; and, swathed in tie-dyed pajamas and a Surprise Bald Head Wig (his parents wouldn't permit the thirteen-year-old to shave his head), he practiced kicks and lunges for hours at a time. After that, he practiced his cello.

Salzman at home, in California. The author experienced six years of impasse; Bach helped show him the way out. Photograph by Emily Mott.

And he wasn't half bad at it; at sixteen, he was accepted at Yale, having applied as a potential music major. Two weeks before starting Yale, however, Salzman ventured up to Tanglewood, in Lenox, Massachusetts, to attend a recital by Yo-Yo Ma. "And that was absolutely one of the transformative experiences of my life," he said. "I'll never forget how Yo-Yo walked out onto the stage. I mean, most performers walk out completely stiff, like this, and you can

PROFILES

THE NOVELIST AND THE NUN

Mark Salzman shares an epiphany with his subject.

BY LAWRENCE WESCHLER

Last week, Mark Salzman, the forty-year-old author of four often luminous volumes (a pair of memoirs and a pair of novels), released his most accomplished work to date, a fictional narrative entitled "Lying Awake." The book, a lean (its typescript came in at under a hundred pages), seemingly effortless tour de force, was, according to its author, the product of nearly six years of agonized blockage, doubt, and misgiving.

"Sister John of the Cross pushed her blanket aside, dropped to her knees on the floor of her cell, and offered the day to God"—thus begins Salzman's improbably absorbing tale of a cloistered Carmelite nun in the midst of a spiritual crisis. *Every moment a beginning*, she thinks, *every moment an end.* Presently, she gets up, dons her robe and wimple, and goes over to her desk to review a sheaf of poems, the writing of which had kept her up till well past midnight the night before. They are the latest evidence of an outpouring of grace that mysteriously began three years earlier, slaking what had degenerated into a dry and cramped midlife vocation.

She rises, tidies her room, and silently carries her washbasin down the hall to the dormitory bathroom. She empties its contents into the sink: "The motion of the water as it spiraled toward the drain triggered a spell of vertigo. It was a welcome sensation." Instead of going to the choir to wait for the others, she returns to her cell, kneels down once again, and unfocusses her eyes:

> Pure awareness stripped her of everything. She became an ember carried upward by the heat of an invisible flame. Higher and higher she rose, away from all she knew. Powerless to save herself, she drifted up toward infinity until the vacuum sucked the feeble light out of her. A darkness so pure it glistened, then out of that darkness, nova.

In the radiance, Salzman records, Sister John "could see forever, and everywhere she looked, she saw God's love." At length, thoroughly ravished, she returns to herself and, as soon as she can move again, opens her notebook and begins once more to write.

End of the first brief chapter. During the next few chapters, it becomes evident that Sister John's visitations have been arriving at an increasingly harrowing physical price, that they are preceded by ever more debilitating headaches, and that in fact something is decidedly wrong. Eventually, she breaches the walls of the convent community to go to an appointment with a neurologist, who gives her a battery of tests, including a CT scan.

These tests uncover a small tumor in the temporal lobe, just above Sister John's right ear. Such tumors elsewhere in the brain have been known to occasion convulsions and seizures. Although they manifest themselves epileptically in the temporal lobe, too, as the neurologist now tries to explain, here the seizures tend to be more psychological, or even spiritual, in character—fever spikes of transcendent well-being. Dostoyevsky was said to have suffered from such visitations; and so, apparently, did St. Teresa of Avila, the founder of the Carmelite Order.

Sister John is devastated by the diagnosis (*"Please, God, take anything, take my life . . . but don't take Yourself away from me, don't tell me I haven't known You at all"*), and unconsoled by assurances that the tumor is eminently operable. Returning to the convent, she is racked with misgiving: Had this entire passion merely been some kind of vast illusion, or, rather, was it God's manner of making himself felt in her life? What is she to make of her ongoing (and more and more wrenching) transports? Then again, perhaps she is expected to think of the operation itself as a test of her faith. But the prospect of returning to the aridity of her prior monastic existence is

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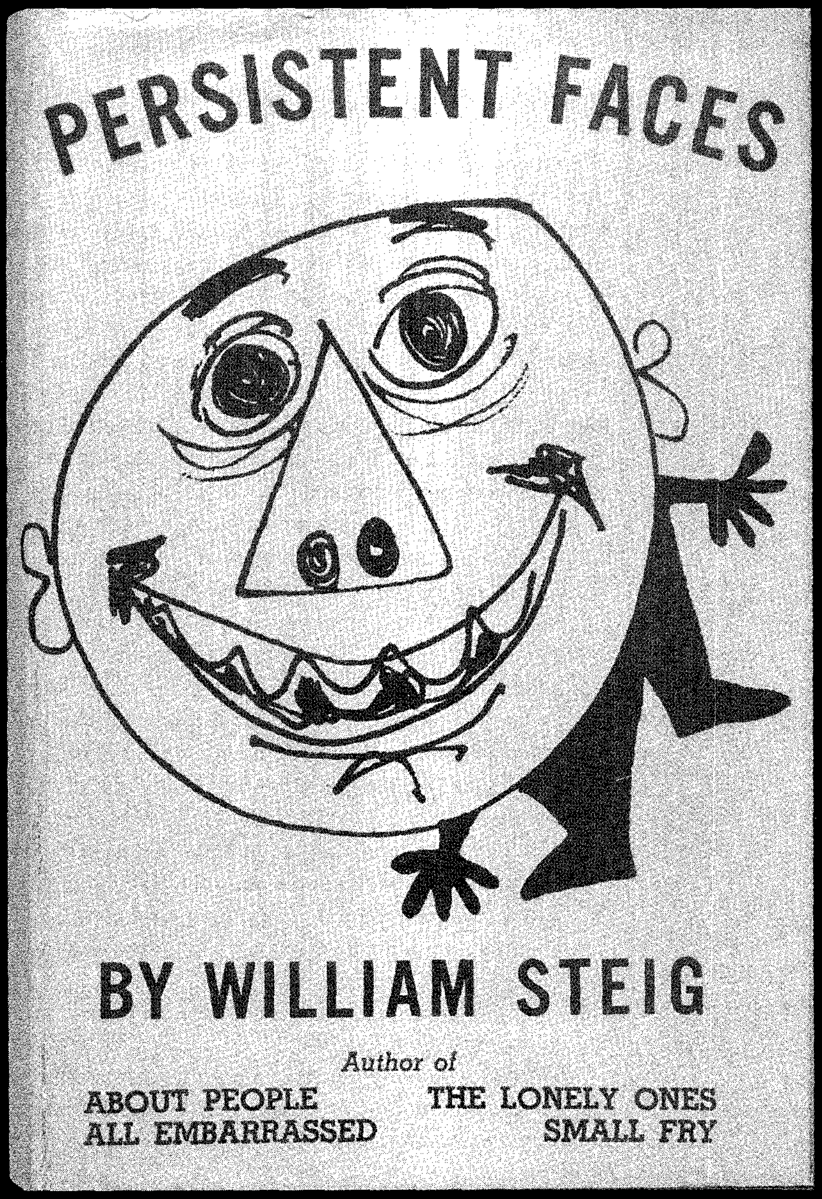
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HOW BUSH WON

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Pundits and political scientists will be analyzing Governor Bush's victory over Vice-President Gore for years to come. For now, it seems clear that the following stratagems and events played key roles in the Bush landslide:

• Colin Powell's assertion on "Meet the Press" that it was the secret threat from the U.S. to Iraq during the Gulf War to send in the Texas Air National Guard—even at the risk of leaving us naked to attack from Mexico—that finally persuaded Saddam Hussein to surrender.

• Bush's repeated demand that Gore return to the Hsi Lai Buddhist temple and "perform a purification ritual" convinced some voters that the Vice-President actually had, as Bush stated, "polluted" the temple, dooming all its monks to be "reincarnated as garden slugs." His remark that he personally thought "Buddharians were fine people" and that he was a "super-big fan" of Richard Gere's was effective, particularly among flaky voters.

• Dick Cheney's announcement that he was donating his $26.4-million compensation package from Halliburton to the Social Security trust fund was a success. Although Bush reportedly had to force Cheney to give up the money by threatening to have Bush's own Secret Service detail "kick [Cheney's] double-wide butt all the way back to Wyoming," it played well among voters because it demonstrated that Bush would not be afraid to use lethal force on his Vice-President.

• Bush's candid remark to Pennsylvania's Governor Thomas Ridge, picked up by a live microphone at the Rolling Rock beer plant in Latrobe, Pennsylvania: "Hey, there's Maureen Dowd of the *Times*. Check out those big-time headlights!" While widely denounced as sexist by commentators, the remark proved popular among blue-collar male voters. Furthermore, some in the media discerned a softening in Dowd's previous notably anti-Bush tone.

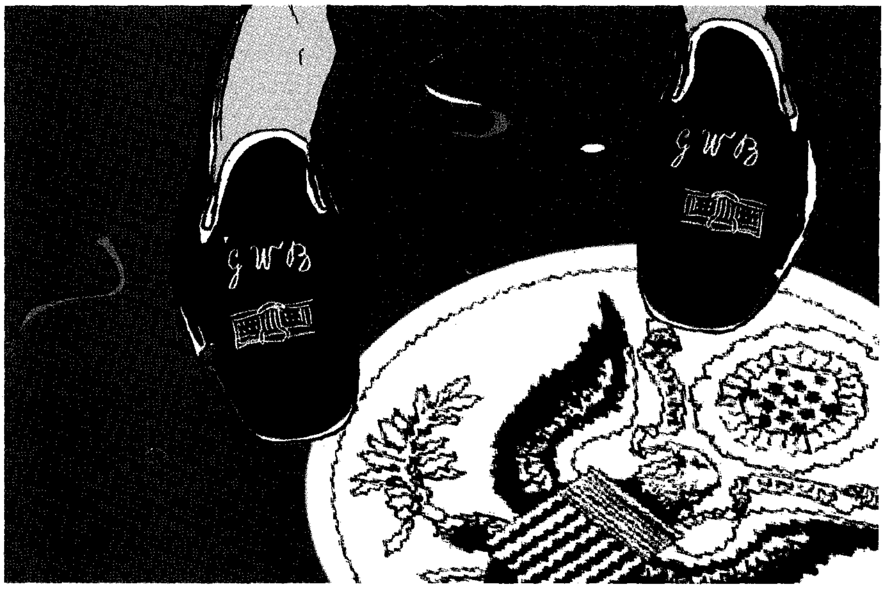
• Bush's planting of a three-second-long kiss on the lips of a startled Al Gore before the start of the first debate was a bold move, accomplishing several objectives: (1) it unbalanced the Vice-President, who mumbled and perspired throughout the debate, and gave incoherent, rambling answers to questions; (2) it demonstrated to gay voters that the Texas governor might be more open-minded on sexual matters than they had previously thought; and (3) it showed that Bush was well equipped to greet French officials.

• Dick Cheney's mid-October conversion bar mitzvah. Though denounced by some U.S. Jews as a transparent, cynical move, it played well among anti-Semitic Americans, who told pollsters that they would feel more comfortable with a Vice-President who wasn't "really" Jewish.

• Bush's appearance on "Oprah," during which he announced that she would be his first nomination to the Supreme Court, played a key role in bolstering Bush's standing among women and African-Americans.

• Cheney's heart attack while dancing to "Hava Nagila" at a nursing home in Hollywood, Florida, cleared the way for Bush to announce that if Cheney were to "croak" in office he would nominate Jennifer Lopez to succeed him. This strengthened Bush's support among Hispanics, males between the ages of fourteen and seventy-five, the entertainment industry, magazine editors, pizza deliverers, and cabdrivers. (Note: Bush's references to "debrillification" and "Cardillac arrest" apparently lost him votes among people who felt that a President of the United States ought to be able to speak English.)

• Bush's appearance on "Late Night with David Letterman," during which he presented his Top Ten Reasons Why David Letterman Should Be Lethally Injected, scored well with viewers who are tired of top-ten lists.



ISTVAN BANYAI

• The Governor's announcement that he would choose his Cabinet and his Administration entirely by national lottery turned out to be a shrewd move, despite its being subsequently declared illegal by the Supreme Court. A private poll taken by the Bush campaign suggested that, the long odds notwithstanding, few Americans would pass up their one chance to become Ambassador to the Court of St. James's or Secretary of the Treasury.

• Bush's October Surprise charge that Gore, a Southerner, had owned slaves while he was a senator, though demonstrably untrue, forced Gore to go off message during the campaign's critical last days. ♦

insists that the scaffolding is there to do only what scaffolding ought to do, and that it will be gone in a month or so. He also insists that, in this case, it is the reasonable little guys in the management office who are being held up by the unreasonable little guys downstairs. "Way back when," he says, "when we first bought the building, we made a modification in their lease which promised them money toward a total overhaul of the space, to bring it up to code, make it aesthetically more in tune with the year 2000." The "aesthetic overhaul" has not happened. Meanwhile, he says, the price that Spiro and Christine and George are asking to leave the coffee shop keeps going up. ("We stopped participating once they hit a million.") "At the beginning, they were very coöperative," Kurtz says. "We said, You know, a new clientele, they're not looking for greasy bacon. Try to serve more salads."

There are keen-eyed observers of the coffee shop and the building who think that, just this once, the new owners are being less than perceptive about their interests. Part of the romance of the building lies in its hand-operated elevators, its visible wiring, its down-home coffee shop. It is certainly easier to imagine Martha Stewart's letter to her readers praising George and Christine and Spiro ("I often brood on how we find inspiration in the most unlikely places. When we moved from midtown to the Starrett-Lehigh Building, we did not know that we would find the best recipe for a grilled-cheese sandwich we'd ever had right here") than it is to imagine Martha leaving her parking space to share one more cup of cappuccino with a couple of up-all-night guys from the Bureau. Although Spiro and Christine declare themselves in it for good—"We're never moving," Christine declares, "we're here for our ten years"—one need not be a completely cynical student of human nature and New York commercial leases to think that if the right offer arrives they will take it. "Come and talk to me seriously," Christine says. "Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars when I've already paid that?"

One recent afternoon on West Twenty-sixth Street, while the willowy young women and the E-commerce visionaries and the advertising men and the Hugo Boss designers poured into the building, and while the scaffolding kept any light at all from seeping into his little restaurant, Spiro repeated his recipe for Tripe Mondongo. "Just the belly. Boil it well, until it is soft, then put it in a bowl of water. Cut it up in pieces, *ch-ch-ch*"—he made the sound of a knife, and followed it with a chopping gesture. "Then put it in butter, olive oil, onions, green peppers."

"Brown it," Christine added blankly, as one who has browned more onions in twelve years than she had quite planned. "You brown it."

"Salt and pepper, hot sauce, then you put in water, just to cover, and let 'em cook," Spiro went on. "Then tomato sauce, tomato paste when it's almost ready, and put in a few raw potatoes in small pieces. You want to make it a little fancier, red wine. And this is it." ♦

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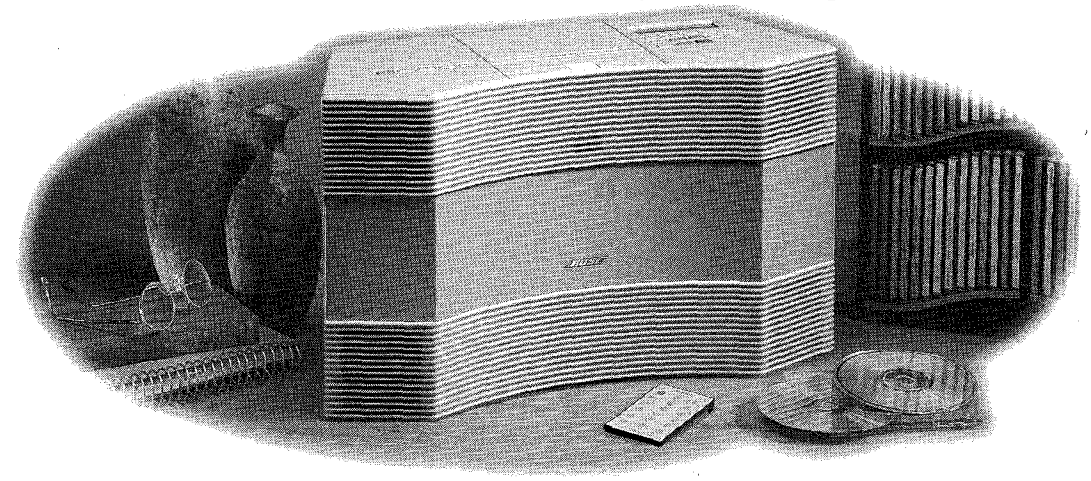

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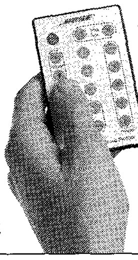

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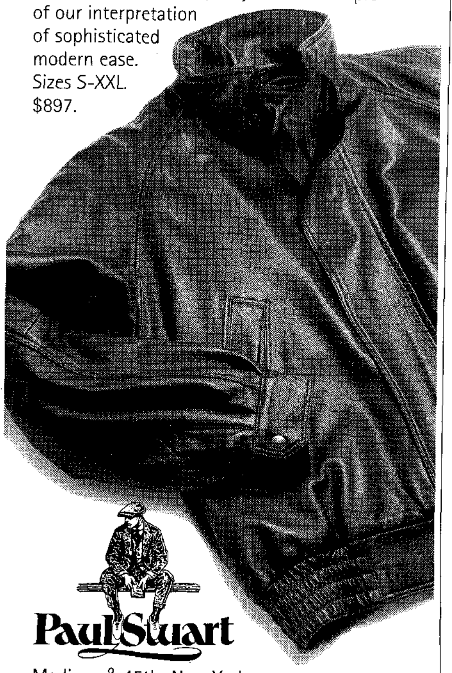

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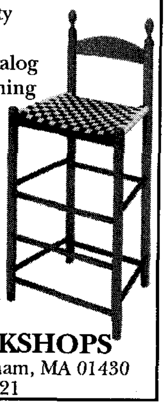
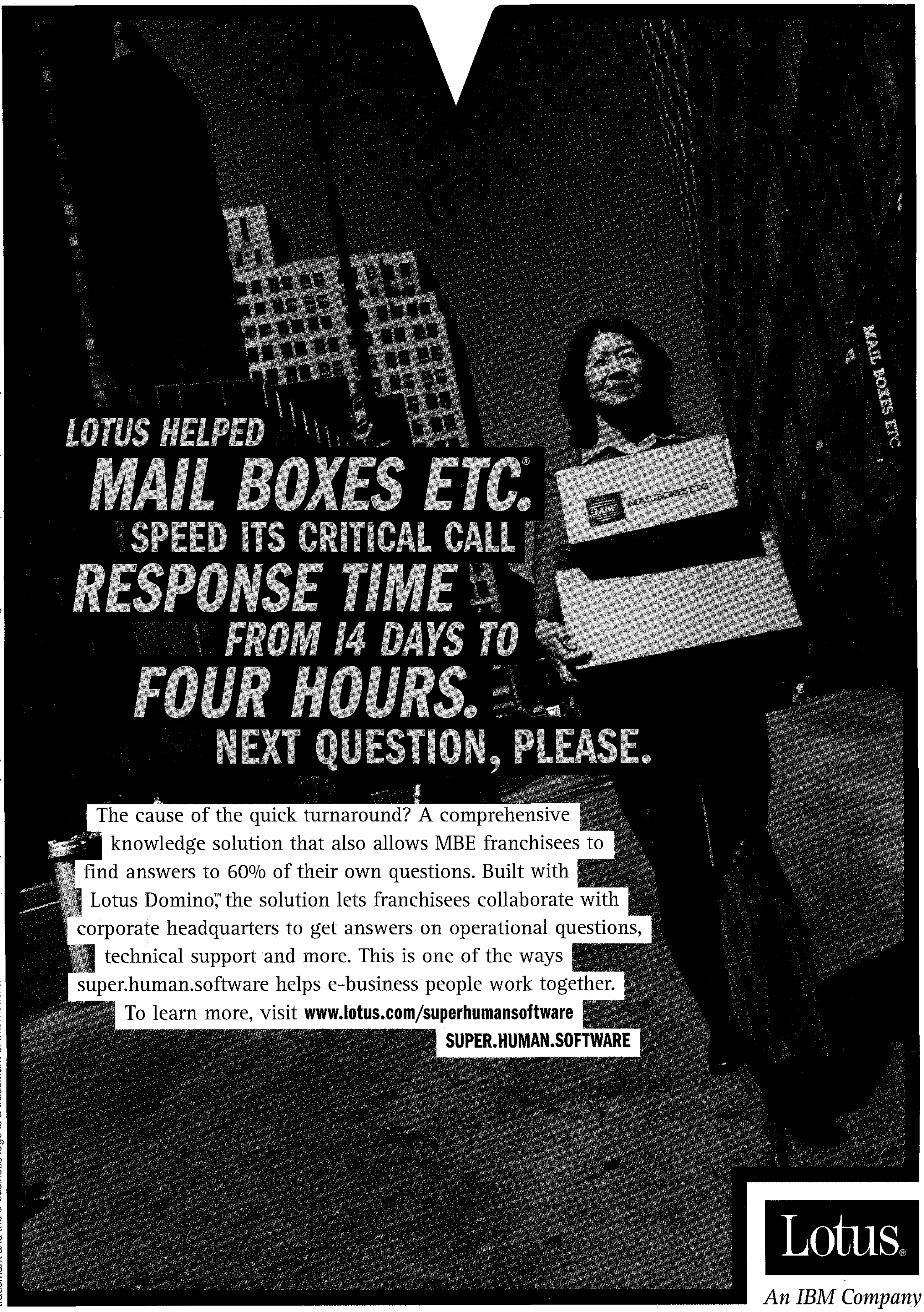


getting newer, cooler tenants that the owners may have begun to suspect they might find a food concession with attractions more obvious than new Formica. George and Spiro and Christine believe that the scaffolding was erected to cut off their light, turning the lobby entrance of their restaurant into a dim, scary portal. The owners also brought in a coffee cart to sell snacks in the lobby—"this despite we have a sole-purveyor clause," Christine says. The whole story involves many complicated New York landlord-and-tenant issues—Dante reserved a circle in Hell where New York landlords and tenants talk for eternity about the second amendment to the leasehold—but its essence is that, in exchange for giving up some space that nobody thought was worth much, George and Spiro and Christine thought they would get to keep the space they have, and even improve it. They are now in court, suing, and they are "miserable."

"I bought this twelve years ago," Spiro says. "It was dead, and I bring it back to life." Spiro and Christine also claim that the new owners have "threatened" them by saying that someday they will be all alone in their restaurant, reading the *Daily News*.

Another rule of New York life is that nobody is ever the big guy. Everyone is a little guy, or chooses to present himself as one. Our two most popular recent mayors ruled in a tone not of satisfied authority but of querulous, beleaguered persecution. (A sign of Donald Trump's spiritual out-of-townness is that he still believes it is in his interest as a big shot to act like one.) It is therefore not surprising that Rob and Harry and Mark believe themselves to be characters just as sympathetic as Christine and Spiro—after all, they were the ones who found a dead place and brought it back to life. They took a building that was losing twenty thousand dollars a day and turned it into one that has a rent roll of around forty million dollars a year. They have peeled icicles from the landmark façade when they threatened to drop on passersby. The building is their love, their obsession—their coffee shop.

"This is a pretty menschy group of guys," Rob Kurtz says. "We've had conflicts before, but we've usually left with a handshake and a nod of 'fair fight.'" He



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rattling machinery sorted D-class mail. Most of Matsui's windows had been blacked out. "It was a primitive form of air-conditioning," Kurtz says. "They wanted people to pay attention, not to look out the window." All that changed in 1998, when the new team took over. Some things did not change, however. A couple of the lower floors have nothing but telecom switches in them—electronic hardware that boosts the signals in fibre-optic cable—watched over by a handful of men who presumably spend a lot of time reading the *Daily News*. The F.B.I., with its own large garage, has long been a major tenant on the second floor, though what precisely the F.B.I. does there no one knows and no one asks—another mysterious thing.

It was Harry Skydell's intuition that New Economy mavens could be made to see that (in Kurtz's words) "a building that was built in 1930 was perfect for 2000," and, in particular, that the high ceilings and vast spaces of the building were exactly right if you had to run twelve or thirteen conduits of fibre-optic and broad-band cable overhead. Skydell, a small, distinguished-looking man who, in short-sleeved shirt and yarmulke, can sometimes be glimpsed in his twelfth-floor office, conferring quietly with his friends, has done this before. He was the man who brought the Puck Building back to life, in the eighties, making that building the Brill Building of its day, too. Where the tone of the Puck Building was fringe-of-SoHo raffish, the Starrett-Lehigh's tone is post-ironic and inspired. The décor of the reclaimed spaces is a mixture of high tech, low tech, and no tech: industrial shelving and gym-prom tables with Mac computers on them, a quick glass-brick wall dividing sales types and creative types, the thick cables held down with gaffer tape on the cast-iron columns. People crowd virtuously together in the hand-run elevators and take pleasure in the unchanged, open-wiring look of the common areas.

"It's not what it looks like, Margaret."

The Starrett Coffee Shop Restaurant does not belong to the New Economy. It belongs to what might be called, following a remark by Christine, one of the owners, the O.K. Economy. ("What kind of business is it?" A shrug. "It's an O.K. kind of business.") It has a Formica takeout counter, a row of six Formica booths, and a small coffee counter near the window, with low stools clad in orange and brown leatherette. The Starrett Coffee Shop Restaurant is owned by Christine and her husband, Spiro, and a man named George. (They would prefer not to give their last names, because they find it all "embarrassing.") They have been in the building for twelve years. Spiro came to America from Greece in 1969, and has worked in the restaurant trade ever since.

Following a basic New York rule—the smaller the kitchen, the larger the menu—the Starrett Coffee Shop Restaurant offers a hundred and thirty-five items (a hundred and thirty-six if you count "Extra Cheese: 50 cents"). But it is sufficiently up to date that both George and Spiro let Christine do most of the talking. She is articulate, young, and has a not utterly innocent way with the rhetoric of the little guy getting stepped on by the big. ("When my son Angelo celebrated his ninth birthday, here was his birthday wish: 'I wish the landlord would stop harassing my parents.' ")

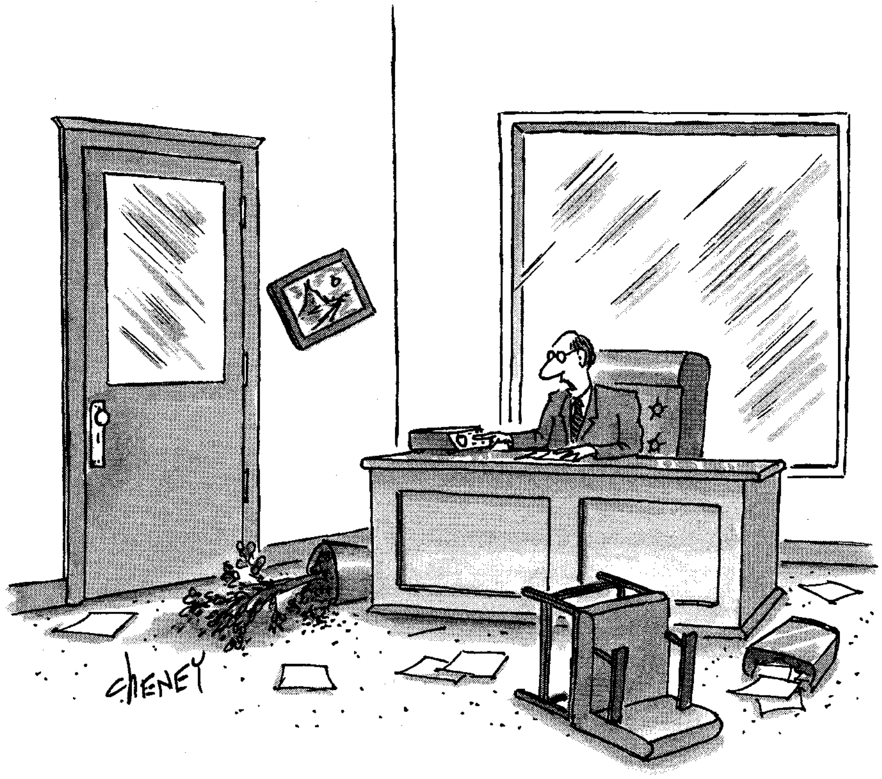
"Two years ago, they approached my husband and his partner," she says.

" 'Bring in white collars, computer guys, bring in a better set of people,' " Spiro adds.

"They wanted our help," Christine goes on.

"They looked around, saw all the new Formica, and said 'Fine, fine,' " Spiro says. He is middle-aged, with gray hair, dewlaps, and basset-hound eyes. He wears his behind-the-counter whites all day. He gets up at four o'clock every morning to come in from Queens, where he and Christine live, and works a twelve-hour day, and this has left deep hollows under his eyes. ("I used to work sixteen hours a day. I'm willing to work a twenty-four-hour day.") If you were hiring someone to play Spiro in a movie, you would hire Spiro.

It was only after the building started



"Miss Parker, you have my permission to shoot anyone who tries to enter my office on a scooter."

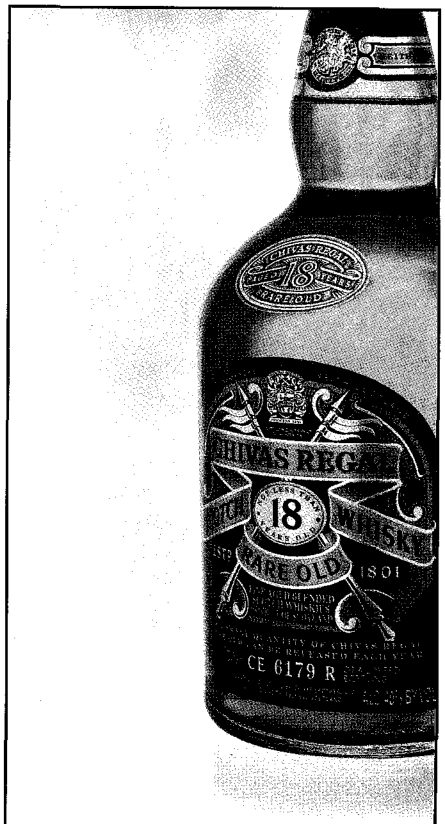
* * *

joint venture of the Starrett Investing Corporation and the Lehigh Valley Railroad, back when the railroad was something. The building has almost two and a half million square feet of space inside, and is usually said to have the third-largest "footprint" of any building in New York. At first, it was a freight terminal, where goods were taken out of railroad cars and stored. After the Second World War, it became a light-manufacturing building, too, a place where flyers were printed and cheesecakes were baked and metal was cut into strange, purposeful shapes.

For a freight terminal, it has some mysterious aspects. For instance, it was designed by an architect named Yasuo Matsui, who generally gets the credit for the Bauhaus-like horizontal window-wall design (those windows made it one of the very few American structures to be included in the Museum of Modern Art's epochal "International Style" exhibition, in 1932), but is otherwise unknown. He seems to have slipped into town, built a huge modern building, and then slipped right back out.

Another mysterious thing about the Starrett-Lehigh Building is that for a long time nobody noticed it was there. As much as an incredibly big building in Manhattan could disappear, it disappeared. For more than forty years, it was left forlorn and unattended on the West Side. In the early seventies, it became the property of the Helmsley empire, whose efforts at leasing it consisted mainly of putting very, very big lettering on its very, very big north side, saying "SPACE FOR RENT," and then giving up. The sign is still there. It is a landmark.

Members of the new Starrett-Lehigh management speak of the Helmsley era exactly the way citizens of Narnia speak of the White Witch and the big freeze she brought with her. "This place was just left alone," says Rob Kurtz, a member of the small, tightly knit group of owners and managers who now run the big building, many of them observant Jews who have known each other since childhood and day camp. "It was filled with weird business. Beth Israel Medical Center had medical supplies here. Everything, from bedpans up, with a couple of guys reading the *Daily News*." There were also camera-case factories and, on one floor, a giant postal sorting facility, where ear-



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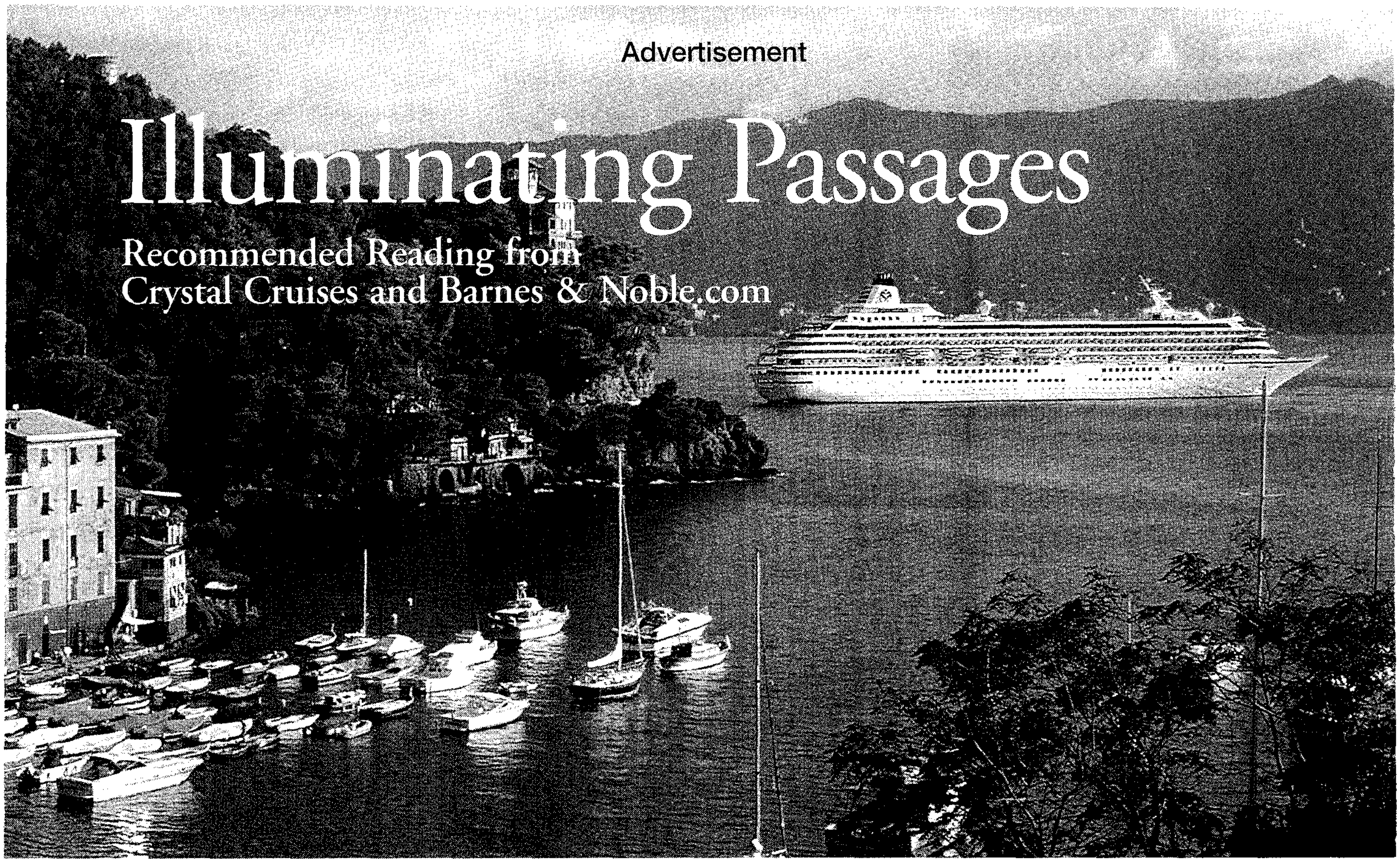

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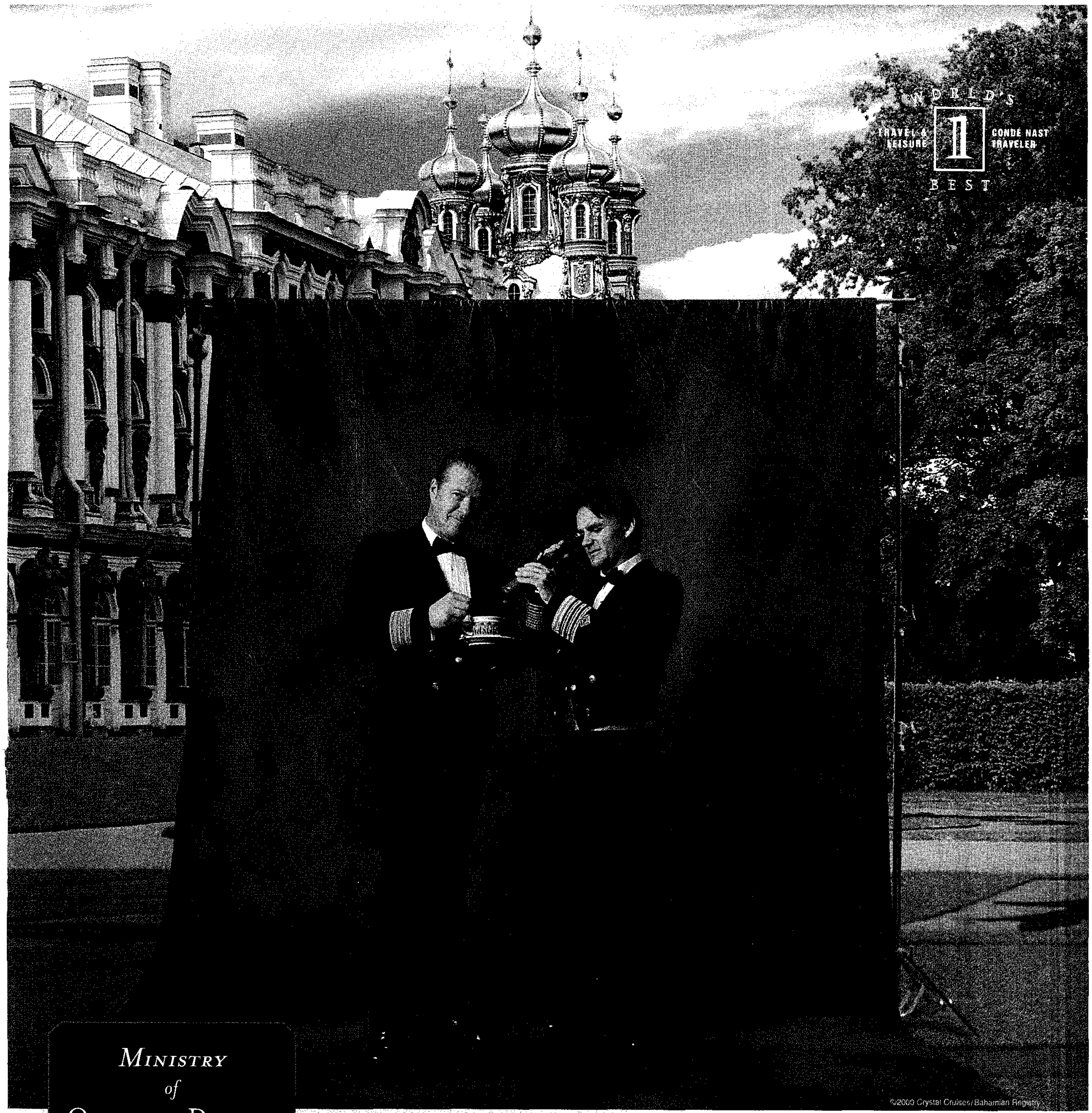

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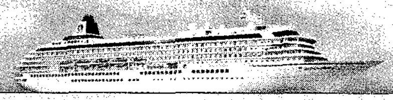

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NEW YORK JOURNAL

FOOD FIGHT

Does two-dollar tripe have a place in the New Economy?

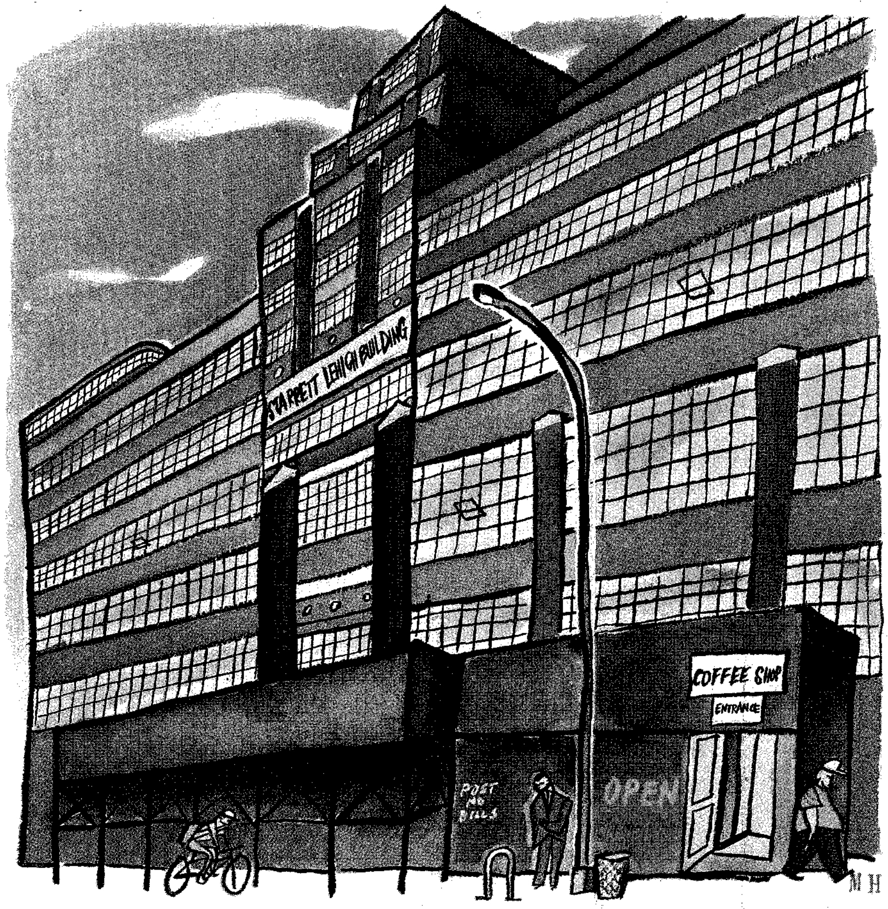
BY ADAM GOPNIK

It would probably be going too far to say that the Tripe Mondongo at the Starrett Coffee Shop Restaurant is all that stands between the New Economy, as it has already revealed itself, and the Economy Yet to Come—going too far, but not going entirely in the wrong direction. Apart from being a pretty good plate of tripe—and, at a dollar ninety-five, a steal for any member of the New Economy with a couple of dollars of venture capital left in his pocket and an ache for offal in his heart—the Tripe Mondongo, which is advertised on the menu as one of the " 'New' Starrett Specialties," is one of the little things whose fate may help to settle what the next city will look like, not to mention what it will smell like, and how much sliced pepper and hot sauce it is going to contain.

The Starrett Coffee Shop Restaurant (it is called both things at once, without an "and" or an explanation) sits, as it has for forty years, on the ground floor of the immense and suddenly fashionable Starrett-Lehigh Building—or the Starrett-Lehigh Center for Creative Arts, Media, and Technology, as its new owners would rather you call it. The building, nineteen stories high, occupies the entire block between Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues and Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh Streets. Two years ago, it was bought by a group of investors led by Mark Karasick, who, with the help of the legendary real-estate man Harry Skydell, transformed it from a black hole on the edge of Manhattan into the Brill Building *de nos jours*. Some of the flashiest dot-com startups have found a home there. Jay Chiat's ScreamingMedia is there, and so is Michael Hirschorn and Kurt Andersen's Inside.com. Fashion people have gone there, too. Spaces that only eighteen months ago were filled with bedpans and junk mail are now showrooms: Hugo Boss has taken fifty thousand square feet, and Ralph Lauren's Club Monaco twenty-five thousand, both at the going rate of about thirty-five dollars a square foot. (Hugo's space is filled with mannequins in new suits, their ebony faces staring, strangely, not straight ahead but straight up, as though seeing the mother ship coming home.) In a few months, Martha Stewart herself will move a chunk of her empire of Irish linens and out-of-focus backgrounds into the building. She and her group will occupy a hundred and fifty thousand square feet, including a skylit clerestory, on the ninth floor. (Martha will have her own parking space on the ninth floor, too. The building is one of only two in Manhattan with an elevator big enough and powerful enough to lift a truck, and so Martha will be able to drive her Chevy Suburban from Connecticut straight to her desk.)

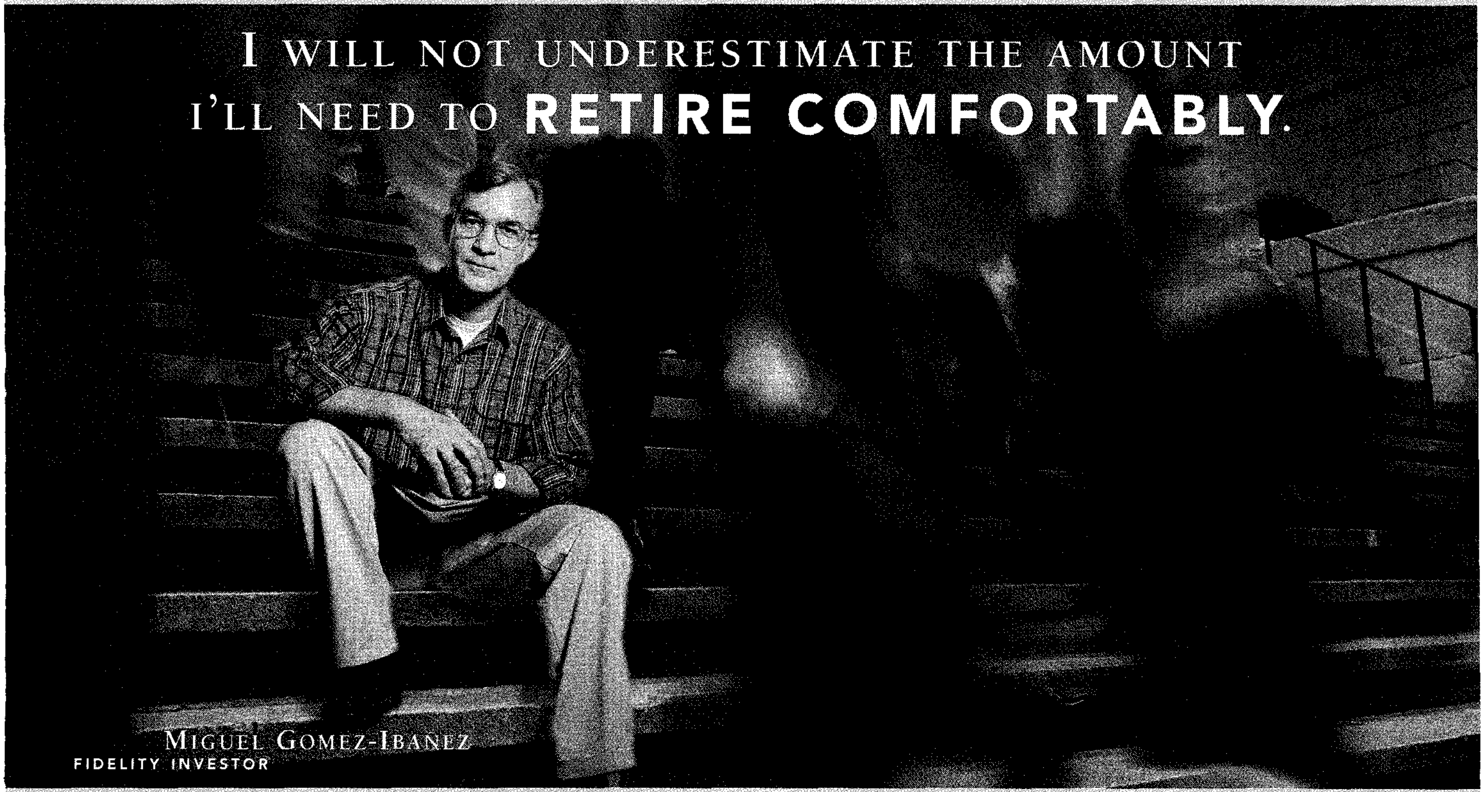
Right now, though, along with the steady lines of chiselled-looking young men and willowy young women with Furla backpacks, the most striking thing you see outside the Starrett-Lehigh Building is a big wooden scaffolding, which prevents any light from entering the windows of the Starrett Coffee Shop Restaurant. Depending on whom you ask, this scaffolding is part of the lavish and expensive refacing of the building, which has already produced one sparkling new lobby, complete with immense etched-glass panels, or else it is a way to harass the people who run the coffee shop into giving up their lease in order to make way for a more millennial kind of restaurant—the kind of restaurant that does not serve two-dollar tripe, and that does not put the word "New" in quotation marks on its menu.

From a realtor's point of view, the Starrett-Lehigh Building shows that what has traditionally taken years to happen in a neighborhood can happen to a single building more or less overnight, at least if the building is about as big as a neighborhood in the first place. The Starrett-Lehigh is called the Starrett-Lehigh because it was built, in 1930, as a



After forty years, a coffee shop finds itself in a suddenly sought-after building.

MARCELLUS HALL



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THE FINANCIAL PAGE
LESSONS FROM LUDLUM

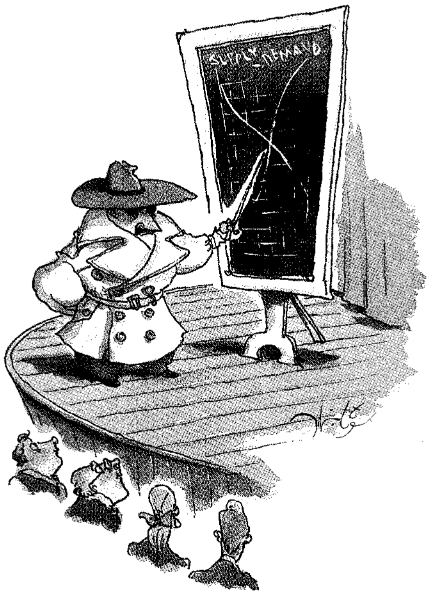
In their perpetual quest to stay one step ahead of the game, American businessmen have become inveterate readers, or, anyway, skimmers. They flip through the classics of management theory and the latest books with "Blur" or "Speed" in their titles, and study the putative leadership lessons of Machiavelli and Shakespeare. Where they probably don't look for enlightenment is in the thriller section of the bookstore. Yet there's a trove of wisdom there about the past two decades of the global economy. You just need to look under "Ludlum."

Robert Ludlum is, of course, the best-selling thriller writer of all time, having sold more than two hundred million copies of his twenty-two novels, and he has become known for the sweep and intricacy of his plots. What hasn't been adequately appreciated is his sophisticated understanding of capitalism. Ludlum came of age during the Cold War, but he was always more engaged by what was going on outside or behind it. In particular, he was fascinated by capitalism's ceaseless attempts to slip the bonds of national sovereignty—and by the spectre of corporations beholden to no one but their shareholders. Even more striking is his depiction of the changing nature of the corporation itself. If you take "The Matarese Circle," which came out in 1979, and "The Prometheus Deception," which comes out later this month, you have a capsule history of the transformation in business thinking over the past two decades.

"The Matarese Circle" was written during the heyday of Harold Geneen, of I.T.T., and Charles Bluhdorn, of Gulf & Western. These were men who ran giant conglomerates of companies connected by little more than the fact that they had the same owner. The sheer size of the conglomerates, people assumed, made them bigger than the market. Their only meaningful opposition was government.

In "The Matarese Circle," accordingly, the conglomerates have decided that the logical solution to the perpetual conflicts besetting the planet is simply to replace the violent rule of states with the aggressive but peaceful rule of multinational corporations. "The new world," the head of the conspiracy explains, "will be committed to the marketplace, to the developing of resources and technology that insure the productive survival of mankind." Well-trained managers would guarantee that that technology would be used as efficiently as possible, and that the world would be free of all those non-economic considerations—race, religion, nationality—that just get in the way of economic development.

This wasn't a completely unappealing prospect in the stagflation-crippled, violence-racked world of the late seventies. More to the point, it captured the conglomerate's unbounded faith in the power of managerial planning. For the conglomerates, the market could ultimately be tamed. The real problem was making sure you stayed on the right side of the state.



MICHAEL WITTE

History proved the conglomerates wrong. The deregulation of industry, the rise of foreign competition, and the greater availability of venture capital all combined to destroy the conglomerates' power. People lost faith in huge, hierarchical corporations, and came to have newfound respect for the power of markets. Real control has come to seem like an illusion, as even the most entrenched corporations watch billions of dollars in shareholder value disappear overnight. Hierarchy is out; "flatness" is in. Information has become the most precious asset.

Now Ludlum brings us "The Prometheus Deception," which, perhaps energized by the quasi-utopian vision of the New Economy, is his most ingenious novel yet. At the heart of it is Systematix, a Seattle-based company run by one Gregson Manning, a sort of Bill Gates with charisma. Systematix, which is devoted to the creation of enormous information databases and a panopticon of global surveillance, is ethereal where the conglomerates were ponderous. In fact, it's the perfect new-model corporation, building its influence through alliances and networks. As Manning explains it, "The boundaries are down. . . . Pyramidal organization yield[s] to fluid, self-organizing means of collaboration." These are buzzwords, yes, but carefully chosen ones. In just a few scenes of "The Prometheus Deception" Ludlum distills a year's worth of *Harvard Business Reviews*, and provides a dead-on picture of contemporary corporate strategy—from the impact of Metcalfe's Law to the emergence of the "virtual corporation." The old pro could probably give the Boston Consulting Group a few pointers.

One way in which Ludlum transcends his genre is that behind the supposed villain there's always a vivid sense of the larger system shaping events; namely, capitalism. In this respect, at least, Ludlum echoes the most incisive American novel ever written about capitalism, Frank Norris's "The Octopus" (1901). Norris's novel details the struggle of California wheat farmers against the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, which is threatening their livelihood with its extortionate freight charges. That makes it sound like another populist attack on big business. What distinguishes it is Norris's recognition that the railroad triumphs not because of evil acts but because of the imperatives of the market. "*Railroads build themselves*," the railroad's president says at one point. "Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply. . . . You are dealing with forces when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads . . . not with men." In the century since Norris's book was published, Ludlum has been among the very few novelists who have taken the trouble to master and write about such market forces. Two hundred million copies later, the market has returned the compliment.

—*James Surowiecki*

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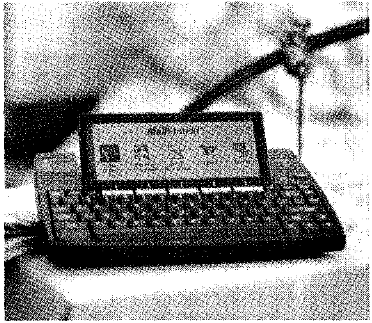

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piece instead—without Ehrlich. "The end result was very unhappy," Shaw said.

By last winter, Ehrlich's relationship with the others had deteriorated further. Two years earlier, the university had bought Ehrlich a nine-hundred-thousand-dollar Carlo Bergonzi violin, and in February of this year the other quartet members learned that, in the course of seeking funds for the violin, Ehrlich had promised a free concert to anyone who made a donation. The others felt that they should have been consulted.

On February 21st, Shaw wrote Ehrlich a letter that began, "Please be advised that your employment with the Audubon Quartet, Inc., and position as violinist with the Audubon Quartet is hereby terminated." The letter directed Ehrlich to deliver the Bergonzi violin into the custody of the university by five o'clock that afternoon. Failure to do so, the letter said, "will result in the filing of a criminal complaint."

Ehrlich was horrified. "I don't like a power play: 'I think you should pack your bags and go,' " he said recently. Two days later, he went to see a local judge, who issued an unusual ex-parte order blocking his dismissal. The judge also declared that the three remaining members of the quartet were "restrained and enjoined from performing concerts as the Audubon Quartet without David Ehrlich or otherwise." Ehrlich and his lawyers have interpreted the injunction as prohibiting the remaining trio from performing in public at all, under any name. It is difficult to find a precedent for this order. Legally speaking, it's as if David Lee Roth, upon being kicked out of Van Halen, had been empowered to shut down the band.

In recent months, the situation has become even more strained. After the three remaining Audubon players performed at a festival in upstate New York, Ehrlich went to the judge and demanded that they be fined and imprisoned. So far, his wish has not been granted. Instead, the judge has ordered the feuding musicians, in effect, to just work it out themselves.

On the telephone the other day, Shaw described the conflict as a matter of artistic freedom. "We are not allowed to associate with whom we want or to play music where and when we want," he said. "This is a travesty." He also cited the Thirteenth Amendment, claiming that Ehrlich was essentially attempting to place the other musicians in "involuntary servitude." Ehrlich insists that they are free enough. "This is not slavery," he said. "If they can't work in this environment, then they can leave. I'm not leaving."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

AT THE MUSEUMS

HOW NEW YORK GOT FULL OF ITSELF

If you want to know about the origins of New York chutzpah, or hubris, or damn-it-all-we're-number-one-ism, a good place to start is the Metropolitan Museum's didactic but highly entertaining new show, "Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861," which runs through January 7th. The Met has assembled more than three hundred objects to show how a relatively unprepossessing urban cluster (166,000 souls) at the southern end of Manhattan Island reacted to the historical imperatives that turned it into the financial, mercantile, and cultural capital of the country. The salient event was the 1825 opening of the Erie Canal, which linked the Port of New York to the West; after that, there was no stopping New York's merchants, bankers, and entrepreneurs, or the artists and artisans who arrived to serve and embellish their soaring self-regard.

Walking through the show last week with John K. Howat, the chairman of the Met's Departments of American Art, who organized it in collaboration with Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, it was hard to escape the feeling that New York hubris got its first big boost from that astonishing polymath Samuel F. B. Morse. Dominating the first gallery is Morse's full-length portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette, looking magnificently dyspeptic in a black cape with a scarlet lining, against a rather lurid sunset. (Lafayette attended the opening of the canal during his triumphal return visit to the United States in 1824-25, and Morse, then a young painter, won the competition to do his portrait.) Morse, who was also a founder of the National Academy of Design, in 1825, did the lively portrait of William Cullen Bryant, in the second gallery, and he turns up again, in the eighteen-forties, as a pioneer photographer. All this, of course, was in addition to developing the telegraph.

As the show unfolds, the pictures get better and the furniture and the decorative arts get worse—increasingly ornate, boastful, and overwrought. There is a room of European works of art, purchased by fledgling New York collectors or exhibited here, that includes Turner's atmospheric "Staffa, Fingal's Cave," which James Lenox, one of the founders of the New York Public Library, bought directly from the artist, by mail order.

There are also some magical mid-century American paintings, and much sculpture—portrait busts, for the most part, but also two full-length female nudes, Hiram Powers's "Greek Slave" (1841-43) and Erastus Dow Palmer's "The White Captive" (1857-58), which demonstrate the power of Victorian moral attitudes. Simply because the young women are shown with their hands bound, their idealized but toothsome nudity was acceptable to women who would never be seen in anything less than layered bodices and toe-length black bombazine. Palmer's statue, we are told, was first exhibited on a rotating platform in William Schaus's gallery, on Broadway, illuminated by gaslight filtered through a tinted shield, which gave her a realistic, pink flesh tone. Gentlemen art lovers could ask an attendant to make her revolve.

The exhibition concludes with Frederic Edwin Church's vast landscape machine, "The Heart of the Andes" (1859), seen exactly as Church intended it to be seen, all by itself in a darkened room. The Met has even re-created Church's elaborate, freestanding wooden frame, which was designed to make it seem as though you were looking at an actual landscape through a casement window. Church sold the painting to a New York collector for ten thousand dollars, an enormous sum at that time. He also managed, with Trump-like enterprise, to exhibit it during the next two years to thousands of paying visitors in New York, London, and several other cities. The nation's first blockbuster picture, it influenced a generation of landscape artists, and proved that, in this town, nothing succeeds like excess.

—*Calvin Tomkins*

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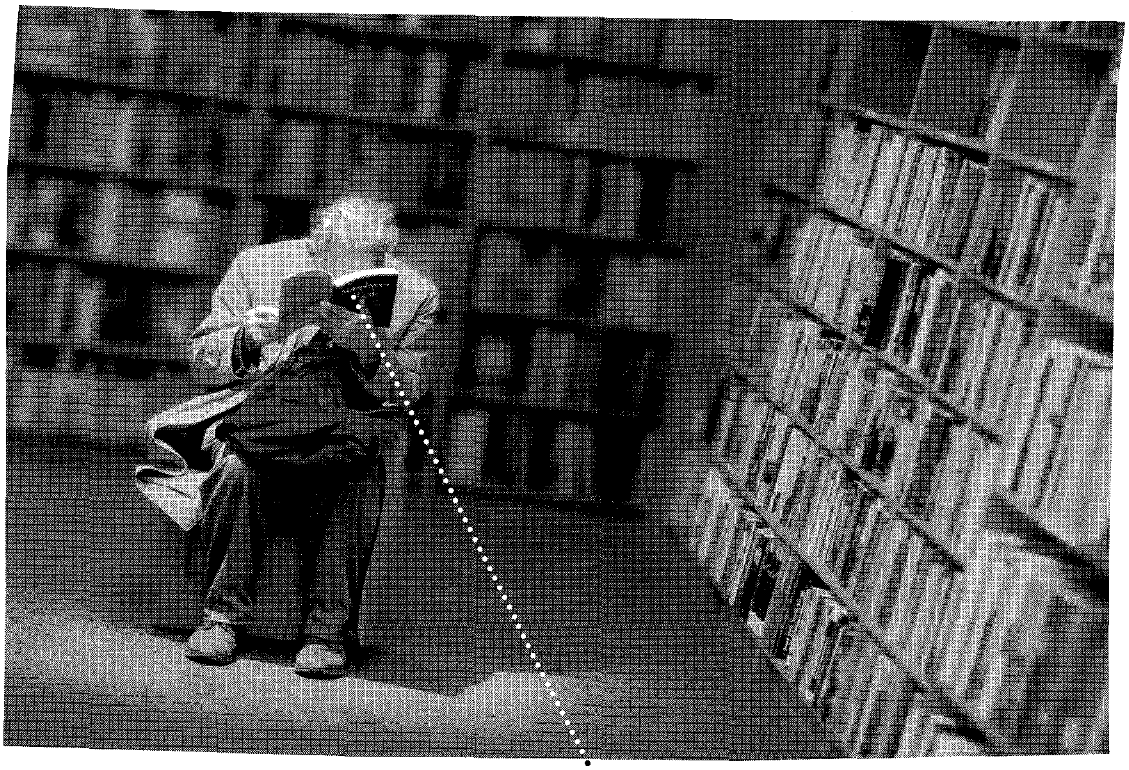

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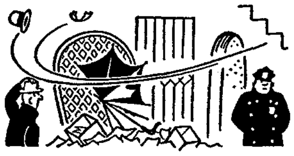
terriers and bariffs are coming down!"

Now Downey has been replaced by Paul Begala, the television pundit and former Clinton aide. In his Bush impersonations, Begala gets points for his native Texas twang and for his familiarity with Bush's career—he has just finished writing a book about Bush's record, titled "Is Our Children Learning?" But some Gore advisers fear that Begala may be too partisan to really channel Bush. Asked how he planned to prepare for the mock debates, he said, "I'll have one of my kids hit me over the head with a baseball bat."

—*Jane Mayer*

DEPT. OF CATASTROPHE

IF A HURRICANE HIT NEW YORK



When Hurricane Floyd struck New York City a year ago, several of the fashion shows in Bryant Park had to be rescheduled. To some, this was a misguided ordering of the city's priorities: the winds of fashion are the proper concern of New Yorkers; hurricanes are not. The notion that New York could be crippled by a hurricane, or a weather event of any kind, is hard to credit. (Blizzards paralyze the metropolis for a day now and then, but that's because we secretly want them to.) The "Midnight Storm" of 1893, a hurricane that obliterated Hog Island, a resort community off of the Rockaways, is all but forgotten; the 1938 New England Hurricane, which killed six hundred people, is only dimly recalled.

The current state of hurricane denial was established in 1985 by Hurricane Gloria, which didn't live up to the media storm it spawned. For years afterward, you could see windows around town x-ed with masking tape in preparation for Gloria—an unsightly reminder of the folly of worrying too much about the weather.

But in fact New York is very vulnerable to the right kind of storm. In the early nineties, the Army Corps of Engineers assigned a group of hydraulic specialists to measure the "bathymetry" of New York Harbor—the topography of the underwater shelf around which the city is built. That data was fed into a computer program known as a SLOSH (for Sea, Lake, and Overland Surge from Hurricanes), which is designed to predict storm surges for hurricanes of different intensities. The surge—the mass of water a hurricane pushes in front of itself—is the deadliest and most destructive part of a storm.

To everyone's surprise, the SLOSH study showed that New York City has a much greater potential for surge-related disaster than officials had previously suspected. A hurricane that followed a path similar to that of the 1938 hurricane could skirt the Outer Banks of North Carolina and pick up speed and power as it headed north. Travelling at sixty miles per hour, the eye of a storm off the Outer Banks could reach New York within six hours. At that point, big winds would shut down the metropolitan area's bridges and major airports. The tunnels would remain open until about an hour and a half before the eye's arrival, but people who waited until the last minute to leave would risk being trapped under the river when the storm surge came ashore.

If the storm struck the New Jersey coastline somewhere above Atlantic City, tracking north-northwest, its east edge, which is where the strongest winds are, would push the storm surge into the funnel of land formed by New Jersey and Long Island, and right up into New York Harbor. In the SLOSH study's worst-case scenario, the surge from a hurricane that struck at high tide would cause water levels at the Battery to rise by as much as thirty feet in a little more than an hour. Most of the entryways to the office towers in lower Manhattan would be completely submerged, trapping people on the upper floors, possibly without power.

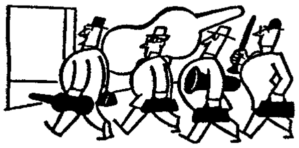
Behind the surge, winds of a hundred miles per hour or more would blow through the streets, their speed increased by up to fifty per cent at two hundred feet (approximately the twentieth floor of most buildings), causing extreme variations in pressure between the inside and the outside of buildings which would cause windows to blow out, raining glass into the streets. For many pedestrians, the only available shelter would be a subway station—but, at least in lower Manhattan, that would be the worst place to be. As the surge came over the bulkheads it would pour into the subway entrances and grates, trapping everyone inside.

Since the SLOSH study was published, in 1993, the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management has developed a hurricane evacuation plan. But New Yorkers don't seem too worried. The other day in Bryant Park, the name Gisele (a Brazilian supermodel) was on everyone's lips; Helene, the tropical storm of the moment, was not.

—*John Seabrook*

THE BENCH

SILENT STRINGS



When Franz Joseph Haydn refined the classical string quartet, in the late eighteenth century, he had in mind a collaboration of four virtuosos who would subjugate their egos and tastes—just a little—to the pursuit of exquisite musical conversation. Presumably, he did not have in mind lawyers, court orders, and the kind of discord that, in recent months, has torn apart the Audubon Quartet, a well-regarded ensemble based at Virginia Tech.

Clyde Shaw, who plays the cello, founded the group in Binghamton, in 1974. In the early eighties, the group was invited to settle at Virginia Tech. They performed at the White House, appeared regularly in New York, and won numerous international awards.

As often happens with string quartets, the membership changed over the years. In 1984, David Ehrlich joined as first violin, and in 1997 Akemi Takayama took over as second violin. Tensions began to surface immediately. Generally, the conflicts pitted Ehrlich against the three others as they endured the usual scuffles over tempo and phrasing. Then, in late 1999, came the showdown: over the Mozart Divertimento in E-Flat Major.

"We had had a policy that if we played as a trio, and only needed one violin, the second violinist got the right of first refusal to play," Shaw said. "Well, we were going to play the Mozart, and David said, 'Listen, this is one of my very favorite pieces. You can't take it away from me.' " The group performed a Beethoven

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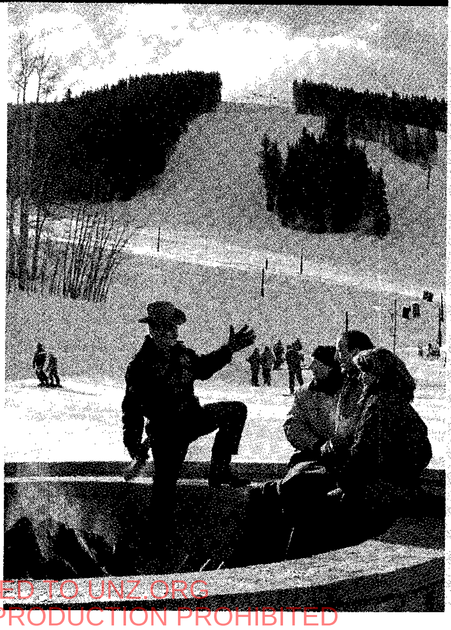


has since concluded that Lee's imprisonment, never mind his solitary confinement, was unjust.) The federal government has no prisons in New Mexico. What it has, instead, is a contract with a private company, Cornell Corrections, Inc., which operates a for-profit "facility" in Santa Fe. Soon after Lee's arrest, Judge Parker expressed concern about the conditions under which he was being held. Once the prosecutors got around to addressing the problem, they met resistance from the prison's management, which took the view that a prisoner is either in "administrative segregation" or he's not, and if he is—well, rules are rules. If the Santa Fe County Detention Center were an ordinary federal jail, a well-placed word from on high would have instantly got Lee a Walkman, a daily exercise hour, a diet beyond bologna sandwiches, and the other small comforts that were eventually permitted him. Those who believe that privatization is a cure for bureaucratic obtuseness should take note.

What Lee was subjected to is appalling for two reasons: it was unusual, and it was usual. Lee, apparently, is the only pretrial defendant ever to have been preventively detained in this manner, except for especially dangerous accused terrorists and obviously violent Hannibal Lecter types. On the other hand, solitary confinement is standard practice in the new "supermax" prisons spearheading the nation's correctional-building boom. According to Human Rights Watch, some forty-six thousand people are in solitary confinement in the United States, and thousands of those have been or will be there for years.

At a time when the public demands harshness, and when rehabilitation is as unfashionable as "rehab" is fashionable, it is probably bootless to call attention to the sometimes extreme suffering of the imprisoned. Nevertheless, as with capital punishment, justice involves more than just deserts. It also involves an understanding that there are some cruelties a civilized society shouldn't allow itself to be provoked into inflicting.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

THE ACTORS STUDIO
BEING GEORGE W. BUSH

Earlier this month, Tom Downey, a former Long Island congressman and a close friend of Al Gore, received a mysterious package. Inside he found a videotape of George W. Bush practicing for the upcoming Presidential debates, as well as a stack of what appeared to be Bush's debate-preparation briefing papers. Suspicious of its origins, and of its sender's intentions (had the materials been stolen? were they part of some kind of Republican setup?), he called his lawyer, who turned over the package to the F.B.I.

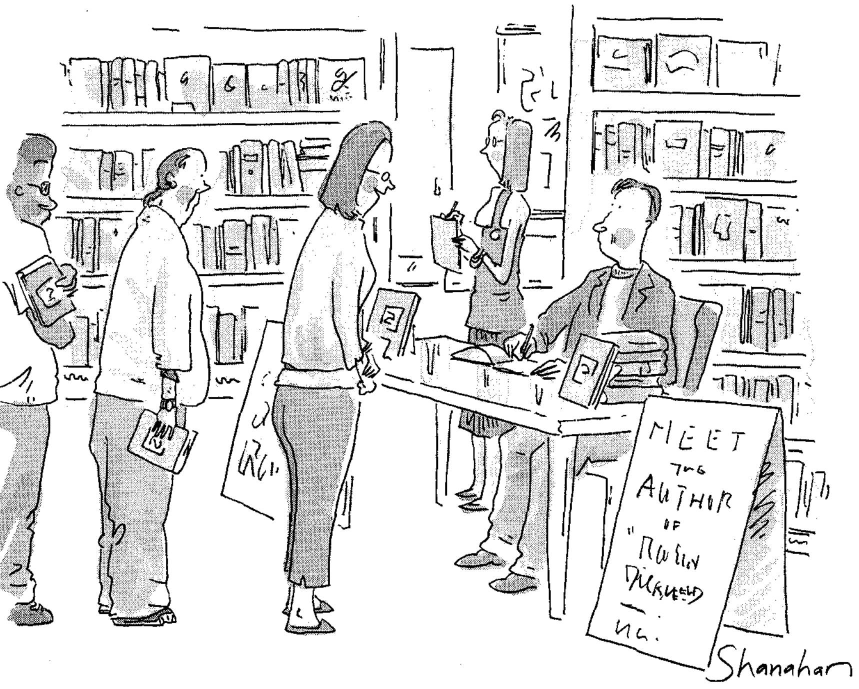
But the damage was already done. Because Downey had received the package, and because he'd had an opportunity to review its possibly purloined contents, he was forced to abandon a role he'd been rehearsing, with great relish, for several months. He was to have played the part of George W. Bush in practice debates staged by the Gore campaign.

According to people who had seen his rendition of Bush, Downey was on the verge of taking debate prep to a new level. "He threw himself into the process completely," Marty Peretz, a close friend of Gore, says. "He had Bush's inflection, Bush's way of using words. It was almost as if he *was* George Bush."

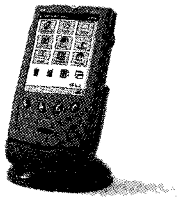
During the last year, Downey has been taking acting lessons from his friend Craig Wroe, a New York actor. Together, Downey and Wroe studied Bush's mannerisms. "We'd watch the tapes, trying to figure out Bush's mind-set," Wroe said last week. "I'd tell Tom to use empathy, to try to understand why Bush speaks in that halting way, or why he always seems to be emphasizing the wrong word. There's always this *fear* in Bush's eyes—like Dan Quayle, but two notches down. And there's the smugness he uses to cover it." At one point, Wroe (who recently appeared on "Guiding Light") had a creative breakthrough. "Bush has this look as if something smelled really foul near him, but he doesn't want to be impolite about it," he said. "As an actor, I'd play him as if there were always something that stinks nearby."

Wroe believes that Downey, a lobbyist who calls himself a "recovering politician," shows real promise. "I think he could be an actor," Wroe said.

"I did once want to be an actor," Downey said. He played the boyfriend in his high-school production of the 1952 classic "Time Out for Ginger." (That would be West Islip High School, the alma mater of Rick Lazio, who wrested Downey's congressional seat from him in the 1992 election.) George W. Bush was a role that Downey felt he could really sink his teeth into. He had even composed and mastered a few garbled sentences, his personal favorite being "I'm for GNAT, I'm for GAFTA, I'm for NPR, and these



"Just sign it 'To the Lucky High Bidder.'"



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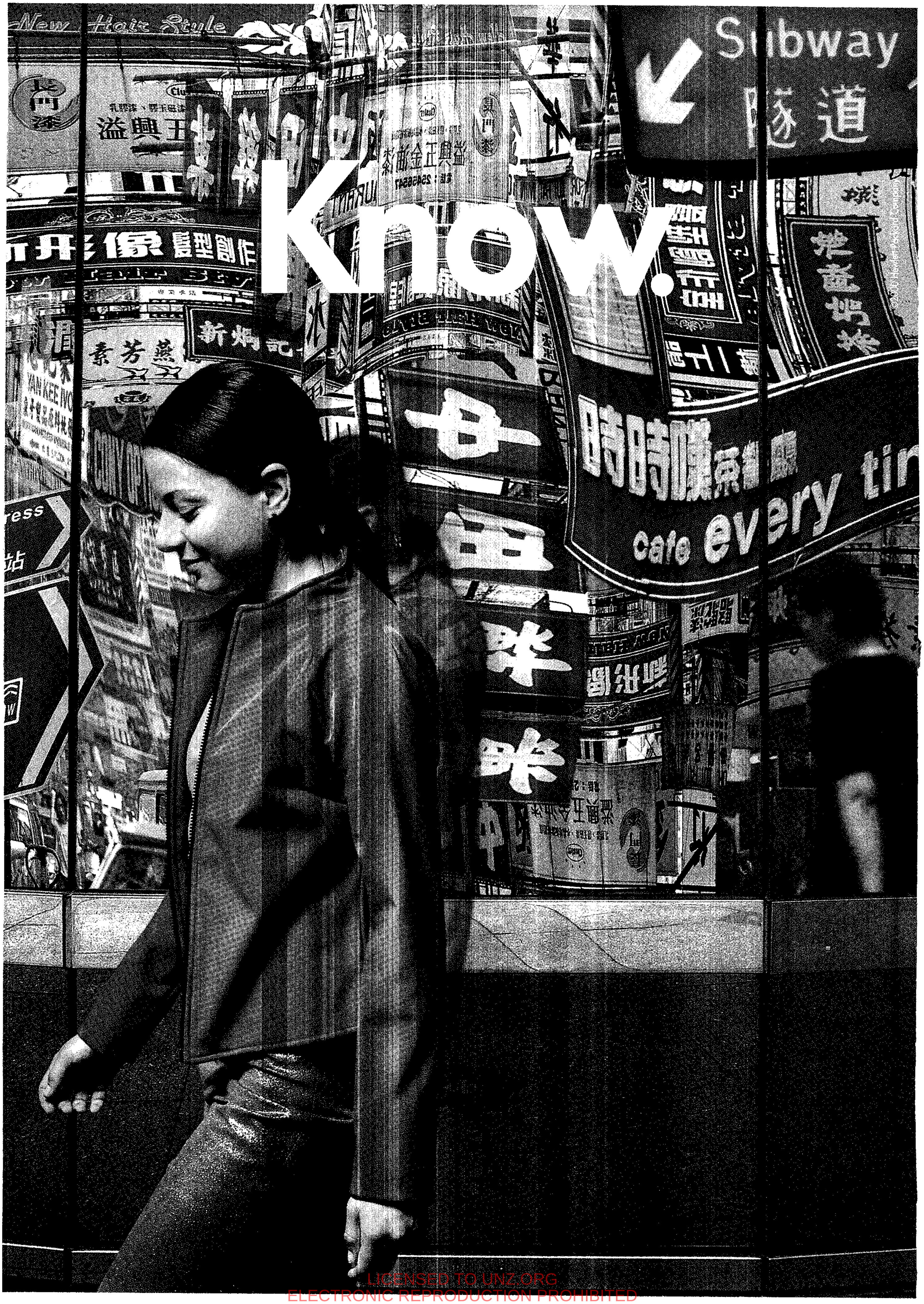

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THE NEW YORKER

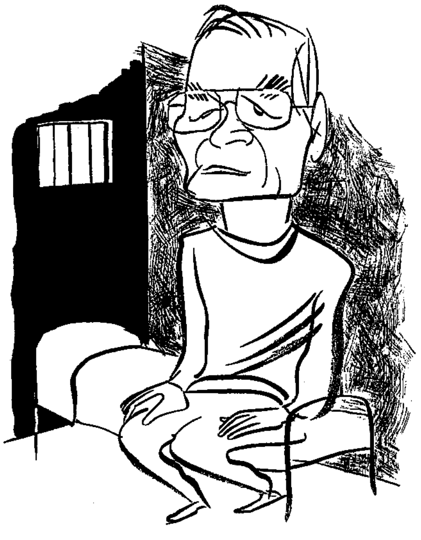
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
IN SOLITARY

In a federal courtroom in New Mexico the other day, the case against Wen Ho Lee blew up like a suicide bomber in an ammunition dump. Wen Ho Lee is the formerly obscure Taiwanese-American scientist who, beginning a year and a half ago, had been portrayed as the mastermind behind the most sinister atomic spy ring since the Cold War days of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. The indictment against him had fifty-nine felony counts, most of which carried a penalty of life imprisonment. Fifty-eight of these have now been dropped. The fifty-ninth—illegally retaining national defense information, to which Lee pleaded guilty—is serious enough. But it's serious in the way that, say, sneaking home a company computer loaded with valuable software is serious, not serious in the way that treason and espionage are serious.

In ordering Lee's release, Judge James A. Parker, of the Federal District Court in Albuquerque, excoriated "the top decision makers in the executive branch, especially the Department of Justice and the Department of Energy," who, he said, "embarrassed our entire nation and each of us who is a citizen of it." The list of those who should (though they probably won't) be made to do some explaining is long. In addition to Attorney General Janet Reno and Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson, it includes the F.B.I. Director, Louis Freeh, whose agency misled Judge Parker about Lee's intentions; Bill Clinton, who, speaking as detachedly as if he were the President of Spain, mused after Lee's release that he had "always had reservations" about the government's treatment of him; various Republican congressional leaders, who serially denounced Reno for being soft on Chinese Communist spies and for countenancing anti-Chinese racial profiling; and the *Times*, which for many weeks relentlessly hyped the Chicom spy angle. (The lead reporter was Jeff Gerth, the same newshound who broke—the verb seemed painfully apt last week—the Whitewater story.)

Most of these wrongs will not get sorted out for a long time, if ever. But one is undisputed: for nine months, beginning on December 10, 1999, Wen Ho Lee was imprisoned under awful conditions. It has been widely reported that he was kept in solitary confinement throughout. That isn't quite true. From April on, Lee spent the working hours of most weekdays in a sealed, specially constructed suite of high-security offices in the Albuquerque federal courthouse, where he worked with his lawyers on his defense. But for the first four months his isolation was nearly total. He was shut up alone in a tiny cell, with the lights kept on, around the clock. Twice a week, with his arms and ankles shackled, he was allowed to shuffle out of his cell—for an hour-long visit from family members (with F.B.I. agents present) and to a small, enclosed courtyard for an hour of whatever exercise he could manage in ankle chains. Such was the treatment meted out to a small, docile, unprepossessing man of advancing age (he turned sixty while in prison) who had never been convicted of a crime, who supposedly enjoyed the presumption of innocence, and who, everyone acknowledged, posed no threat of violence, suicide, or escape.


Wen Ho Lee

The government argued that because of the allegedly overwhelming dangerousness of the nuclear secrets Lee had allegedly stolen and hidden, he had to be not only held without bail but also prevented from communicating with anyone at all except under the closest supervision. (Judge Parker agreed, though he

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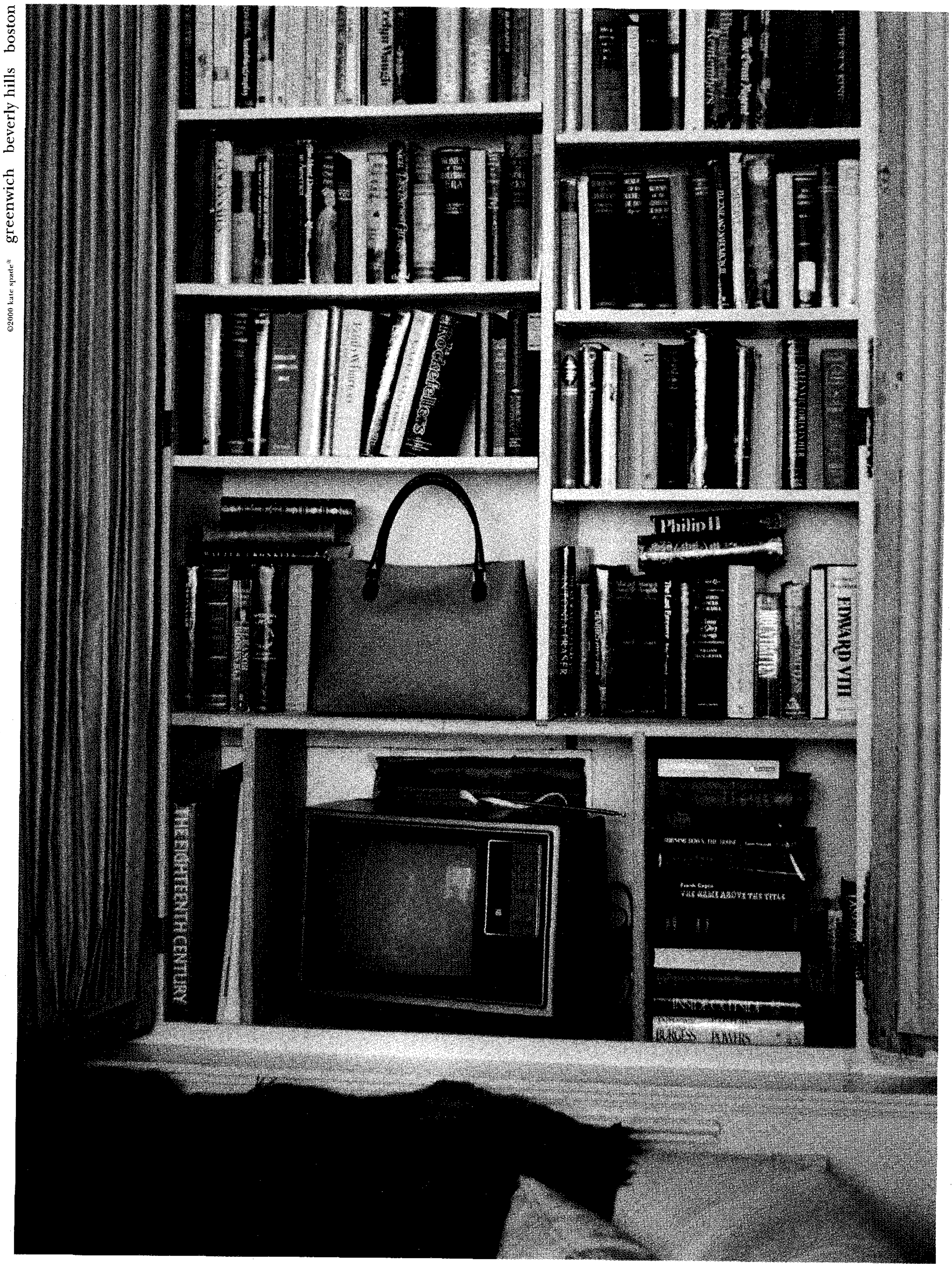

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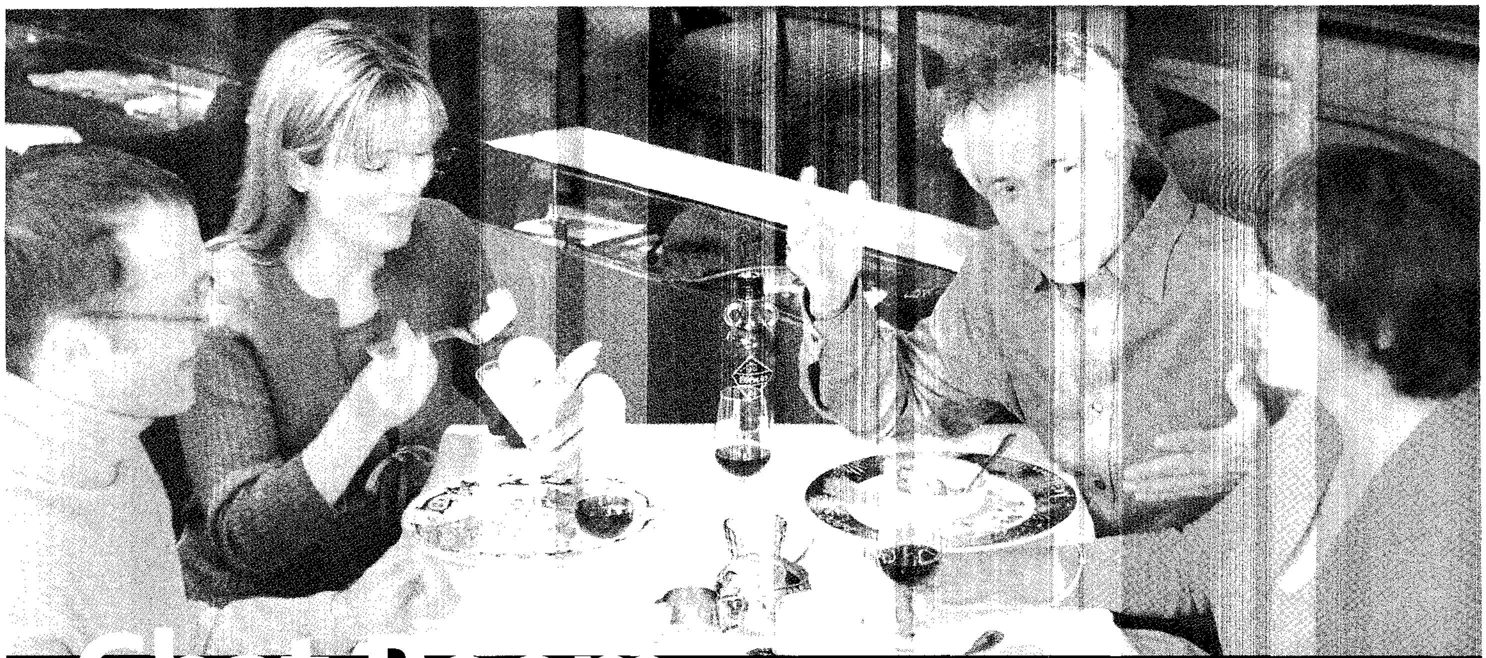

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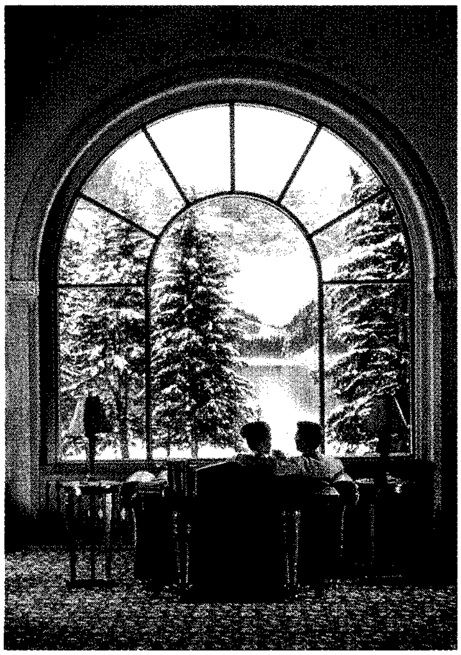

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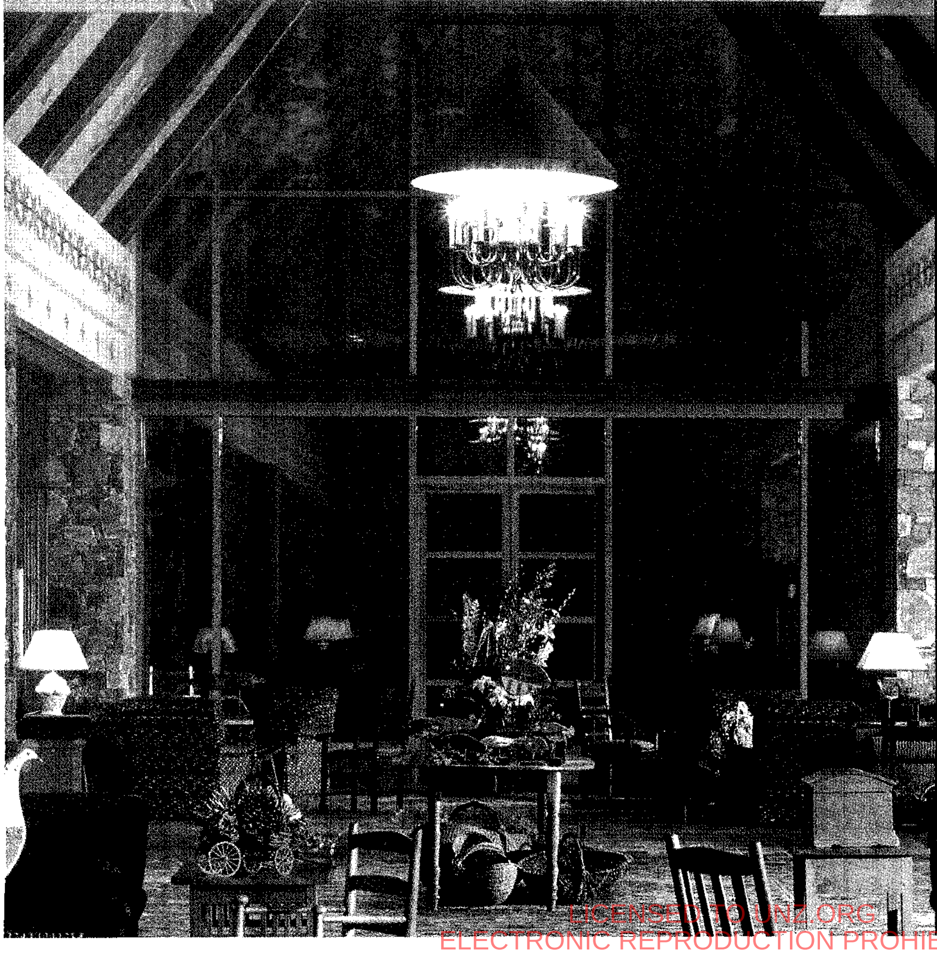

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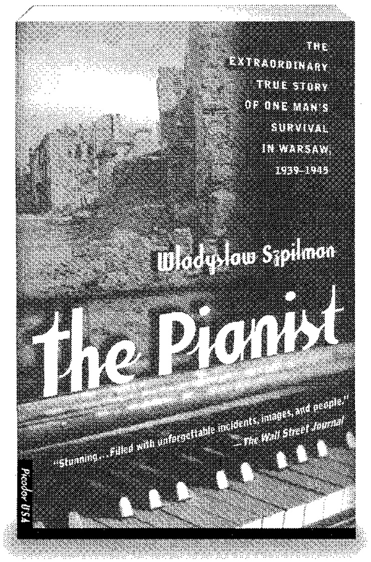
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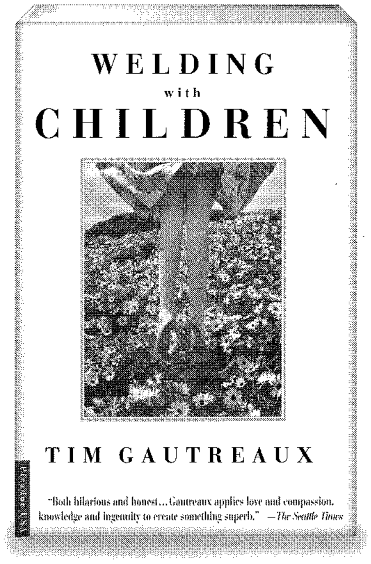
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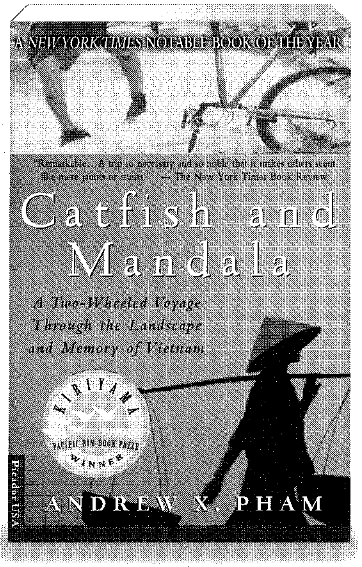
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ment of Innocence" (1996, Mohsen). ♦ Sept. 29 at 9:15, Sept. 30 at 6, Oct. 1 at 7, and Oct. 2 at 8:45: "Gabbeh" (1997, Mohsen).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Sept. 27 at 4 and 8: "The Mother and the Whore" (†). ♦ Sept. 28 at 6:30 and 9:30: "Girlfight" (2000, Karyn Kusama). ♦ Sept. 29 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Conformist" (1970, Bernardo Bertolucci; in Italian). ♦ Sept. 30 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Once a Thief" (1990, John Woo; in Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 1 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Crimes and Misdemeanors" (1989, Woody Allen). ♦ Oct. 2 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Casino Royale" (1967, John Huston, Val Guest, et al.). ♦ Oct. 3 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "A Man for All Seasons" (1966, Fred Zinneman).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Sept. 27-28: "House of Wax" (1953, André de Toth), a 3-D horror film starring Vincent Price, preceded by Bugs Bunny's only 3-D cartoon, "Lumber Jack-Rabbit" (1954, Chuck Jones). ♦ Sept. 29-Oct. 5: "Two-Lane Blacktop" (1971, Monte Hellman).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Oct. 15: "The Imaginary War," a selection of films about fictive battles. Sept. 28 at 6 and Sept. 29 at 2:30: "Seven Days in May" (1964, John Frankenheimer). ♦ Sept. 29 at 6: "You Only Live Twice" (1967, Lewis Gilbert). ♦ Sept. 29 at 8:15 and Sept. 30 at 5: "Heartbreak Ridge" (1986, Clint Eastwood). ♦ Sept. 30 at 2: "Les Carabiniers" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Sept. 30 at 3: "Shame" (1968, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Oct. 1 at 5: "Blade Runner" (1982, Ridley Scott). ♦ Oct. 3 at 6: "Akira" (1988, Katsuhiro Otomo). ♦ Oct. 3 at 6: "Neighbours" (1952, Norman McLaren) and "Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb" (1964, Stanley Kubrick).

THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL

Lincoln Center (875-5050)—The festival runs from Sept. 22 to Oct. 9. Sept. 27 at 6: "The Circle" (2000, Jafar Panahi; in Farsi). ♦ Sept. 27 at 9 and Sept. 28 at 6: "Brother" (2000, Takeshi Kitano; in Japanese). ♦ Sept. 29 at 6 and Oct. 2 at 8:30: "Faithless" (2000, Liv Ullmann; in Swedish). ♦ Sept. 29 at 9:30 and Oct. 1 at 1:30: "George Washington" (2000, David Gordon Green). ♦ Sept. 30 at 12 and Oct. 2 at 6: "Gohatto" (2000, Nagisa Oshima; in Japanese). ♦ Sept. 30 at 3: "Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine" (2000, Bahman Farmanara; in Farsi). ♦ Sept. 30 at 6: "Seven Men from Now" (1956, Budd Boetticher). ♦ Sept. 30 at 8:30 and Oct. 1 at 4: "Pollock" (2000, Ed Harris). ♦ Oct. 1 at 7: "The Gleaners and I" (2000, Agnès Varda; in French). ♦ Oct. 1 at 9:30 and Oct. 3 at 6: "In the Mood for Love" (2000, Wong Kar-wai; in Cantonese).

THE SCREENING ROOM

54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Sept. 29-Oct. 5: Episodes 9 and 10 of "The Decalogue" (†). ♦ Sept. 29-30 at midnight: "The Fate of Lee Kahn" (1973, King Hu; in Mandarin). ♦ Sept. 30-Oct. 1 at 1: "The Saragossa Manuscript" (1965, Wojciech Has; in Polish).

SYMPHONY SPACE

2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through Nov. 28: "Empires of Passion: The Cinema of Obsession." Oct. 3 at 7: "The Collector" (1965, William Wyler). ♦ Oct. 3 at 9:15: "M" (1931, Fritz Lang; in German).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Sept. 23-Oct. 6: "Passion & Defiance: Silent Divas of Italian Cinema." All films are accompanied by live music and have English intertitles. Sept. 27 at 6: "Royal Tiger" (1916, Piero Fosco). ♦ Sept. 28 at 8:30: "Satanic Rhapsody" (1917, Nino Oxilia). ♦ Sept. 27 at 8:30: "Assunta Spina" (1915, Gustavo Serena) and "Vedi Napule e Po' Mori" (1924, Eugenio Perego). ♦ Sept. 28 at 6 and Sept. 29 at 8:30: "Flower of Evil" (1915, Carmine Gallone). ♦ Sept. 29 at 6, Sept. 30 at 8:30, and Oct. 2 at 6: "Story of a Woman" (1920, Perego). ♦ Sept. 30 at 3 and Oct. 2 at 8:30: "The Painting of Osvaldo Mars" (1921, Guido Brignone). ♦ Sept. 30 at 5:30 and Oct. 1 at 8: "Malombra" (1917, Gallone) and "Cenere" (1917, Febo Mari).

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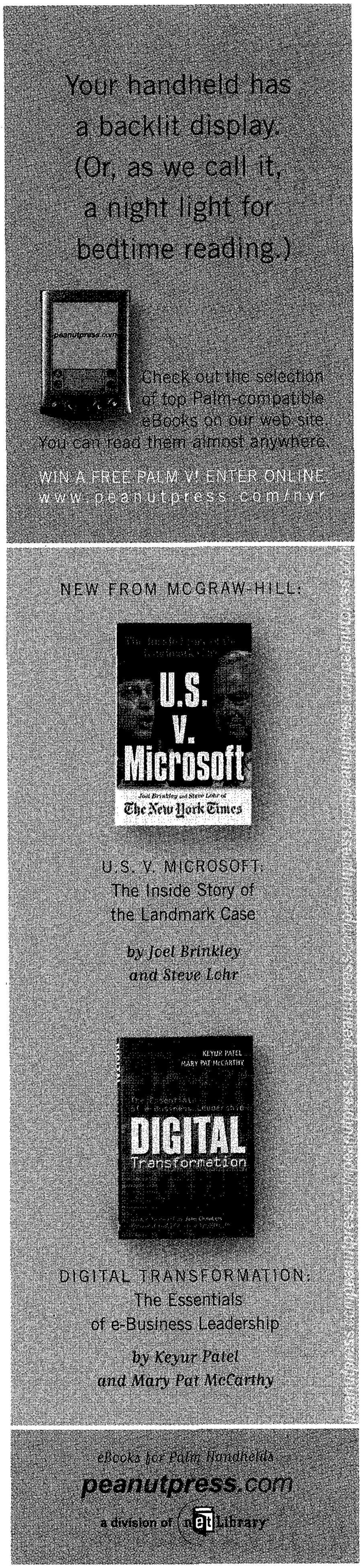
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THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

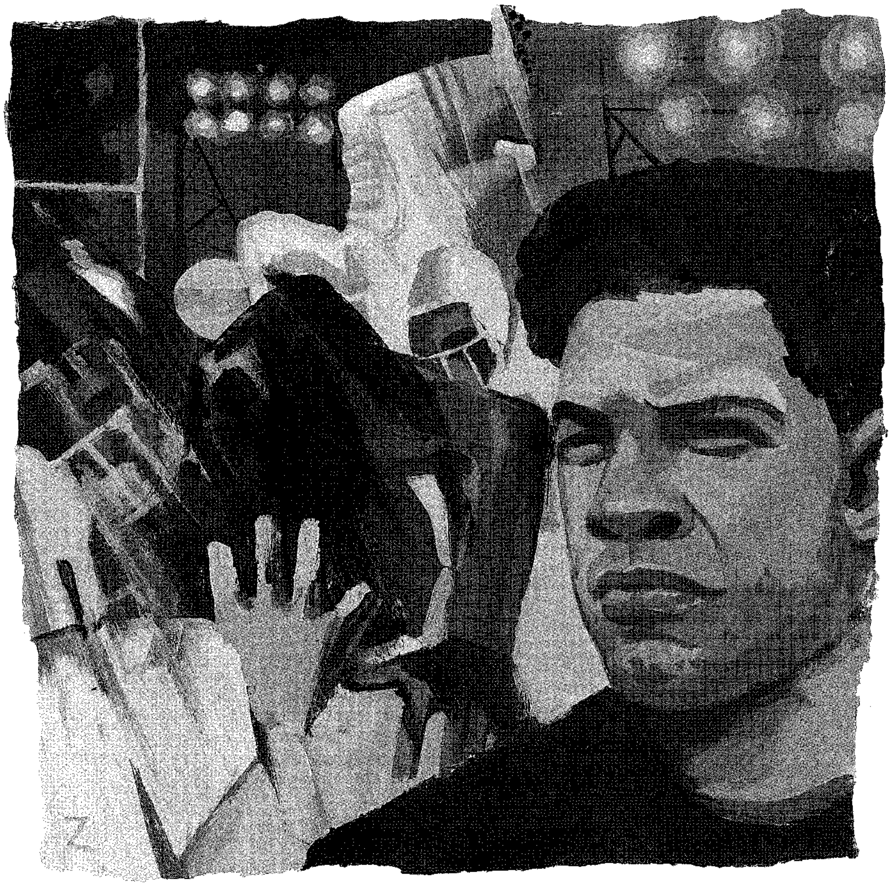
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Ride Lonesome: A Budd Boetticher Retrospective." Sept. 30 at 2: "The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond" (1960). ♦ Sept. 30 at 4: "Buchanan Rides Alone" (1958). ♦ Oct. 1 at 2: "The Tall T" (1957). ♦ Oct. 5: "Comanche Station" (†). ♦ Classic movies. Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 at 6:30: "Chinatown" (1974, Roman Polanski).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Films by two Iranian directors, Mohsen Makhmalbaf and his daughter Samira Makhmalbaf. All films are in Farsi. Sept. 28 at 7:30, Sept. 30 at 9:30, and Oct. 3 at 7: "The Silence" (1998, Mohsen). ♦ Sept. 28 at 9:15, Sept. 30 at 7:45, and Oct. 3 at 8:45: "The Apple" (1998, Samira). ♦ Sept. 29 at 7:30, Sept. 30 at 4:15, Oct. 1 at 8:45, and Oct. 2 at 7: "A Mo-


ZOHAR LAZAR

Opening September 29, Denzel Washington in "Remember the Titans."

that the cool-spirited Syd (Greer Goodman) may just be the woman for him. The story strolls along with ease, picking its way carefully between the nerdish and the hip, and the soundtrack is a memorable breeze, yet you come out feeling strangely underwhelmed. When did the movies last produce a proper Casanova, with the courage of his addiction?—*A.L.* (8/7/00) (Angelika Film Center, Battery Park 16, Empire 25, First & 62nd, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THIS IS SPINAL TAP

Plato and Aristotle held that laughter was a form of gloating, a way of expressing superiority and mocking the stupidity of others. Kant and Schopenhauer focussed on the role of incongruity in generating comedy. Though entirely dead, all four philosophers served as consultants for this 1984 mockumentary about an aging British heavy-metal band. Arguably the funniest movie ever made, the film—directed by Rob Reiner but masterminded by the Tap trio of David St. Hubbins (Michael McKean), Nigel Tufnel (Christopher Guest), and Derek Smalls (Harry Shearer)—is both a sure-shot parody of rock music and a lesson in improvisational brilliance. This remixed and remastered version includes fifteen minutes of new footage, but fans will be more interested in the eighty-three minutes of old footage, which include Guest's interrogation of a pimentoless olive, the least intimidating Stonehenge replica in history, and the legendary amplifiers that do, indeed, go to eleven.—*B.G.* (Union Square.)

THE WAY OF THE GUN

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

THE WIND WILL CARRY US

A beautiful but limited exercise in aesthetic formalism from the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami. An engineer from Teheran (Behzad Dourani) arrives in a small mountain village in order to record some sort of ritual that depends on the death of an old lady. But the old woman, whom we never see, refuses to die, and the engineer waits and waits and begins to question his life. He becomes friends with a little boy, and converses with a variety of people in town, some of whom are also out of sight. He drives again and again to a hilltop to get a clear signal for his cell phone so he can call Teheran and make small talk. The picture has a mournful, slow rhythm, rather like that of prayer or a stately ballad, and clearly Kiarostami is saying something about the value of putting down roots versus modern restlessness. But when life is simplified this way and then arranged into a pattern, it yields meaning without much struggle. However handsome the movie, one may feel the game has been rigged. In Farsi.—*D.D.* (8/14/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

AN AFFAIR OF LOVE
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

AIMÉE & JAGUAR
BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.

BAIT
Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.

THE BALLAD OF RAMBLIN' JACK
Pioneer.

CHUTNEY POPCORN
Cinema Village.

DOUBLE PARKED
Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.

DUETS
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.

THE EXORCIST: THE VERSION YOU'VE NEVER SEEN
Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.

GOYA IN BORDEAUX
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.

INTO THE ARMS OF STRANGERS
Lincoln Square.

A PIECE OF EDEN
Battery Park 16.

POLA X
Angelika Film Center.

SOLAS
BAM Rose Cinemas and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

THIRTY DAYS
Sutton 1 and 2 and Village East Cinemas.

UNDER SUSPICION
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.

URBANIA
Angelika Film Center and Chelsea Cinemas.

URBAN LEGENDS: THE FINAL CUT
84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.

THE WATCHER
Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.

WOMAN ON TOP
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, and Union Square.

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and the two stars have a nice rhythm together. Janssen, with better material, could blossom into the next Julia Roberts; she's pretty irresistible even in this low-key stuff.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16 and Empire 25.)

THE MOTHER AND THE WHORE

This controversial three-hour-and-thirty-minute film, produced, written, and directed by Jean Eustache, is about the aging young of the Left Bank, who live in an atmosphere of apocalyptic narcissism. Eustache's method resembles the static randomness of the Warhol-Morrissey pictures, but the randomness here is not a matter of indifference; it's a conscious goal. He tries to push viewers beyond patience—to rub our noses in his view of reality, implicitly saying, "I'm going to show you more of the tormented soul than anybody has ever shown you before." This soul belongs to a poor young nurse named Veronika, and this picture stands or falls on the viewer's attitude toward her recital of her sexual humiliations and her loathing of sex without love. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Sept. 27.)

NURSE BETTY

A calm, sunny comedy from Neil LaBute, who is taking a break from the nastiness of previous work like "In the Company of Men." That was cinema as vivisection; this has its spasms of violence, but its target—disappointingly soft—is the delusion of ordinary folk. Betty (Renée Zellweger) is a wife and waitress who sees her husband (Aaron Eckhart, wiping out memories of his scruffy biker charm in "Erin Brockovich") murdered in their Kansas home. In blithe mental confusion, she sets off for Los Angeles, pursued by the killers (Morgan Freeman and Chris Rock), to find a fictitious doctor—the supergroomed hero of a television soap. He is merely an actor (Greg Kinnear) who can't decide how to handle the unwavering force of her credulity. Zellweger strolls and simpers through the story, while Freeman falls in love with her from afar. LaBute wants to inspect their uncomprehending obsessions, but the film feels too flimsy to bear much satirical weight.—*A.L.* (9/11/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Coronet Theatre, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE ORIGINAL KINGS OF COMEDY

Eager to escape the constraints of television, four black comics—Steve Harvey, D. L. Hughley, Cedric the Entertainer, and Bernie Mac—began touring around the country in 1997, and Spike Lee, using lightweight video cameras, caught their act last February in Charlotte, North Carolina. The results are pretty much sensational from start to finish: you feel the warmth of a live show and the pleasure the men take in shaping the evening. Steve Harvey can be scathing in a palms-down, slightly fey style of irritated disbelief—reminiscent, in this one respect, of Jack Benny. D. L. Hughley is small and querulous; he burns with the shrill exasperation of the put-upon male. Cedric the Entertainer does soft-bellied dance steps and offers candid imitations of ordinary folks. Bernie Mac, tall, handsome, stentorian, and fearless, says he's past his prime in bed; we don't believe him for a minute, but it's a gracious admission of mortality. Most of the jokes are about sex and family and work, and about shame, too—the humiliations too deep for ordinary people to admit. Among other things, the movie is a tender-dirty love song to women, who, Harvey says, have been scandalously neglected by the hip-hop performers.—*D.D.* (9/4/00) (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

RAN

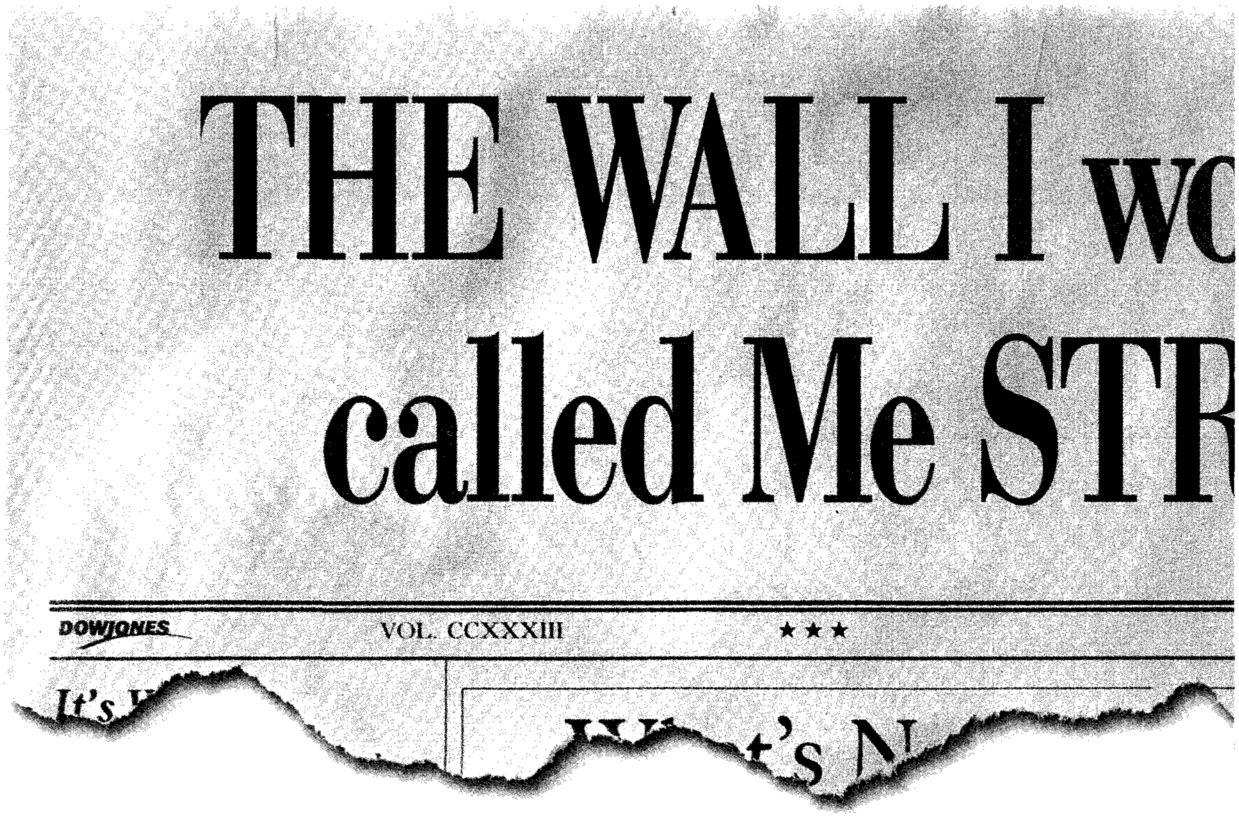
Set in the sixteenth century, Akira Kurosawa's 1985 epic spectacle, a variation on the theme of "King Lear," is static, but it deepens, and it has its own ornery splendor. It's a totally conceptualized work—perhaps the biggest piece of conceptual art ever made. For the first forty minutes or so, the picture is all preparation, and it seems dead, but then the preparation begins to pay off, and by the end the fastidiousness and the monumental scale of what Kurosawa has undertaken can flood you with admiration. The fine, harsh, percussive score is by Toru Takemitsu. In Japanese.—*P.K.* (Eastside Playhouse and Union Square.)

RIFIFI

A quartet of thieves breaks into a jewelry store, and for a tense half hour we watch as they work, silently. The film is like a highly skilled documentary on how to disconnect a burglar alarm and open a safe, and it is thoroughly engrossing, because we see the criminals as craftsmen, and we celebrate their teamwork, their finesse, their triumph. Ironically, we find ourselves sympathizing with their honest exhaustion after their dishonest labor. From there on, this 1955 movie, made in France, by the American director Jules Dassin, follows the tradition of "Scarface," "Public Enemy," and "The Asphalt Jungle" (and of "Macbeth" before them), bringing the tragic, trapped figures to a cadaverous finish. Along the way, Dassin keeps things actively vicious, with glimpses of underworld prostitutes and hopheads and a murder, a kidnapping, and the thrashing of a faithless mistress, who is stripped. "Rififi" is the granddaddy of a batch of suspense films featuring how to knock over safes or break into banks and museums, but its own chief distinction is its nasty tone. In French.—*P.K.* (The Screening Room.)

THE TAO OF STEVE

Jenniphr Goodman's comedy is set in Santa Fe, which comes across as the capital city of slackerdom; apparently entire lives can be structured around the art of the Frisbee. Donal Logue plays Dex, the portly and lovable hero, as a kind of threatless John Belushi—no one is wary of him or his bulk, and women, in particular, are drawn to his bed in spite of themselves. Dex has a book-fed philosophy of successful seduction, although the movie never really shows us his technique in action. Instead, we get melting hearts as he discovers



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MOVIES OPENING

BARENAKED IN AMERICA
Jason Priestley directed this documentary of the Canadian pop band Barenaked Ladies on their 1998 "Stunt" tour. Opening Sept. 29. (State.)

BEST IN SHOW
A mockumentary that sends up the world of championship-dog breeding, directed by Christopher Guest. Along with Guest, the cast includes Fred Willard, Bob Balaban, Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, and Parker Posey. Opening Sept. 27.

THE BROKEN HEARTS CLUB
A contemporary coming-of-age drama about a group of gay men in Hollywood. Directed by Greg Berlanti. Opening Sept. 29.

GIRLFIGHT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 29.

THE GREAT DANCE: A HUNTER'S STORY
Two South Africans, Craig and Damon Foster, directed this documentary about the trackers and hunters of the !Xo San people. Opening Sept. 29.

THE PRICE OF AIR
A tale of suburban dysfunction and drug dealing, written and directed by Josh Evans. With Michael Madsen and Dick Van Patten. Opening Sept. 29.

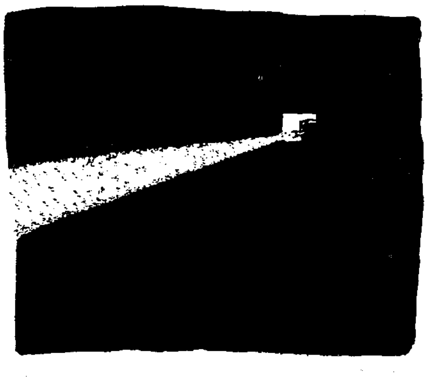
REMEMBER THE TITANS
Denzel Washington plays the first black football coach of a newly integrated Virginia high school in this drama directed by Boaz Yakin. Opening Sept. 29.

TWILIGHT: LOS ANGELES
Anna Deavere Smith's one-woman show about the Rodney King riots, adapted for the big screen by Marc Levin. Opening Sept. 27. (Film Forum.)

FILM NOTES

ALMOST FAMOUS
Cameron Crowe's genial but remarkably undramatic account of his life and not very hard times as a fifteen-year-old rock critic in the early nineteen-seventies. Crowe's stand-in, William Miller (Patrick Fugit), a freckle-faced music lover, leaves home against the wishes of his college-professor mom (Frances McDormand) when he accepts an assignment from *Rolling Stone* to cover a mid-level band called Stillwater. He falls into an intense admiration of the good-looking lead guitarist (Billy Crudup), who is ambiguously friendly, and receives gentle treatment from a trio of groupies, the Band-Aids (led by Kate Hudson). Philip Seymour Hoffman appears as the legendary real-life rock critic Lester Bangs, who mentors William, and Jason Lee rants as Stillwater's infantile lead singer. Much of the movie plays easily and well as a record of good times, but there's no particular point to it. William is never put in enough danger—morally, spiritually, sexually, or any other way—to become a hero for us, and the music of Stillwater is not meant to be great. What's at stake?—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/18/00.) (Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

BRING IT ON
A hyperkinetic teen movie that flirts with some interesting ideas about race, hip-hop, and the overblown world of competitive cheerleading but decides to smile and high-kick instead. The pert-mouthed Kirsten Dunst, captain of a successful suburban California squad, is crushed when she discovers that her team's sultry dance routines were stolen from an all-black squad from East Compton—a form of whitewashing which has a long tradition, from Pat Boone to Vanilla Ice. Without a real showdown, the film merely bounces along with a series of peppy but pointless scenes of young actresses dancing in halter tops.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, 59th Street East Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)



THE CELL
A man's intestines twirled around a golden spit; the pulsating organs of a dissected horse encased in glass; dead women pieced together as mechanical dolls—these are just some of the gruesome tableaux encountered by Jennifer Lopez, who plays a child psychologist who travels, via an experimental drug, into the mind of a serial killer. The plot doesn't make much sense, but the imagery is arresting. The director, Tarsem Singh, made his name in music videos, and his feature début is full of intense visual trickery; he relies on surreal contrasts (snowflakes falling on a sunlit desert) and clever cuts (from pouring milk to a body drenched in bleach). Since most of the film takes place inside a psychopath's mind, the normal, comforting conventions of suspense don't apply.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Cinema 3rd Ave., 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

COMANCHE STATION
In this tight, unpretentious 1960 Western, director Budd Boetticher and his screenwriter, Burt Kennedy, shrewdly surround the righteous Randolph Scott with colorful good-bad and bad-good guys portrayed by avid novices and veterans hungry for a spot even in the desert sun. They include Claude Akins, Skip Homeier, and the Kevin Bacon of early-sixties B movies, Richard Rust—all of whom are part of a crooked gang conniving to get the hero's reward for rescuing a mother from Indian captivity. Sam Peckinpah said he didn't care for Boetticher's Westerns, but "Comanche Station" in particular is a worthy predecessor to his "Ride the High Country," which also starred Scott.—*Michael Sragow* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Oct. 5.)

DANCER IN THE DARK
The new Lars Von Trier film makes his previous efforts—"Breaking the Waves" and "The Idiots," for example—seem like models of orthodoxy and restraint. Shot in Sweden, it's set in America, or, at least, in an America of Von Trier's own devising. Most of the characters speak with foreign accents, and the heroine—a timid, bespectacled factory worker and single mother named Selma—is played by Björk, the Icelandic pop munchkin. Selma has a congenital eye disease, and she is saving up to pay for an operation for her young son, who will otherwise follow her into blindness. When the money is stolen by a neighbor (David Morse), a vengeful Selma quickly conquers her shyness with the help of a gun, and from there it is a short step to the courtroom and the gallows. The film is unashamedly two-toned, split between a granular authenticity and a stylized gaudiness. Every so often, Selma's predicament becomes so dire that the director decides to make a song and dance about it. The musical scenes—in the factory, on a railroad track, and so forth—have a deliberate, stamping awkwardness, overlaid with Björk's animal wailing. Since the movie showed at Cannes, many viewers have refused to stomach this unhealthy mixture, yet it feels laced with surprising power, and the harshness of the denouement is unfeigned. With Catherine Deneuve as a weary worker in a head scarf, something you don't see every day.—*Anthony Lane* (9/25/00) (Cinema I, Cinema 3rd Ave., Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

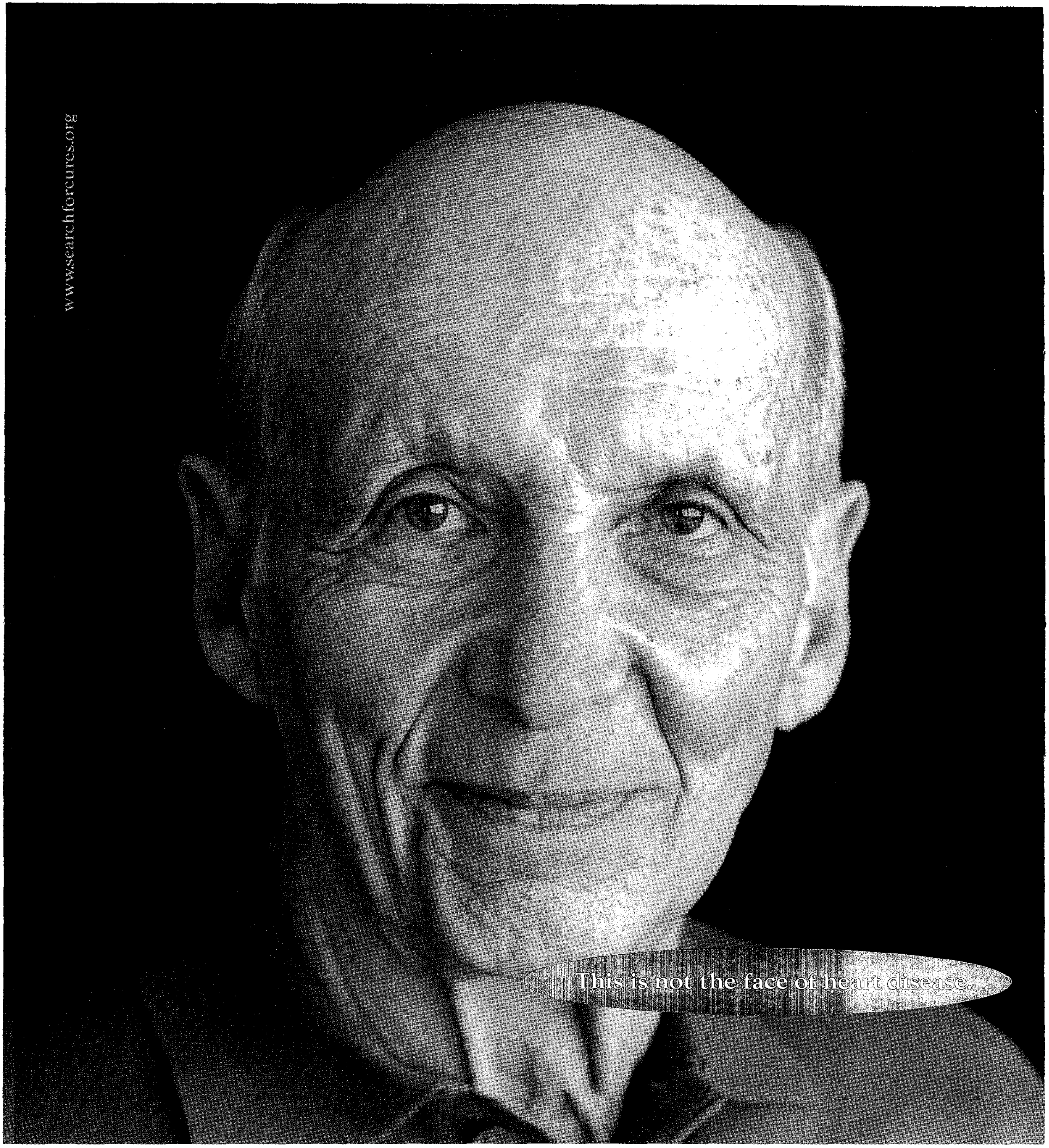
THE DECALOGUE
In 1988 and 1989, the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski made a series of ten films for Polish television, in which each movie, roughly an hour in length, was devoted to one of the Ten Commandments. The films, set largely around an apartment complex in Warsaw, are not so much literal illustrations of the commandments as fables inspired by them—very modern fables, it turns out, featuring relations between men and women, and parents and children, of a depth and intensity not seen since Ingmar Bergman stopped making movies in the early eighties. In Polish.—*D.D.* (6/12/00) (The Screening Room.)

GIMME SHELTER
The facts of the Altamont debacle are well known: Hell's Angels, hired as security by the Rolling Stones for a free concert at a Bay Area speedway, bullied and beat their way through the audience, eventually stabbing to death a young black man named Meredith Hunter. What is less well known, perhaps, is how skillfully the Maysles Brothers' 1970 documentary builds to that horrible conclusion. In the film's opening scenes, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, and company light up Madison Square Garden with effulgent performances of "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and "Satisfaction." But the Maysleses undermine the triumphant mood by intercutting scenes of the Stones ensconced in a cramped editing room, reviewing rushes from Altamont (including a truly wrenching shot of Hunter's stabbing, parsed and slowed for maximum effect). The pain in Jagger's eyes as he watches the murder footage lasts only a moment before he papers over it with his strutting-cock persona, which in turn dissipates almost immediately. It is the collision of these two extremes—the Stones as erotic gods, the Stones as chastened schoolboys—which generates the film's enduring pathos.—*Ben Greenman* (Film Forum.)

GIRL ON THE BRIDGE
A waifish young woman (Vanessa Paradis) attempts to drown herself but is saved by a knife thrower (Daniel Auteuil) who persuades her to join his act, where she becomes both nerveless victim and indispensable muse. He whirls her from one fancy location to the next, living on the slim proceeds of their success and gazing with avuncular disdain upon her incessant amours. The movie promises to be as steely as the flying blades, and the knife-tossing sequences make you flinch; but the director, Patrice Leconte, seems unable to match the coolness of his heroine, and the story droops into whimsy. Still, here is your chance to study the phenomenon that is Ms. Paradis—a huge draw in France and the beloved of Johnny Depp, who sports a similar set of cheekbones. In French.—*A.L.* (Angelika Film Center and First & 62nd Cinemas.)

HUMAN RESOURCES
For all those moviegoers panting for more films about restrictive working practices in the new European economy, this début feature from the young French director Laurent Cantet is a must. Jalil Lespert plays Franck, an ambitious young student who comes home from Paris to spend time at the local steel-pressing plant. His father (Jean-Claude Vallot), who looks like a cowardly walrus, has worked on the factory floor for decades. His bright, inexperienced son goes straight into the personnel department, where the issue is one of restructuring the labor force. We all know what that means. The clash between innocence and experience can be seen coming a mile off, but that doesn't diminish the patient, doomy force of the plot, or Cantet's skill in digging drama out of such intractable material. The inevitable showdown between father and son is like a blow to the heart, and the movie ends in a sort of bewildered daze. Apart from Lespert, none of the performers are professionals; they are proper workers, and it shows.—*A.L.* (9/25/00) (State.)

LOVE & SEX
The writer-director Valerie Breiman, in her first feature, has put together an inconsequential but charming romantic comedy starring the long-stemmed, unpretentious beauty Famke Janssen as a Los Angeles magazine writer and Jon Favreau ("Swingers") as her boyfriend, a wisecracking, rather infantile painter. The movie offers little more than the latest forms of sexual banter, but the teasing mock crises are easy enough to take,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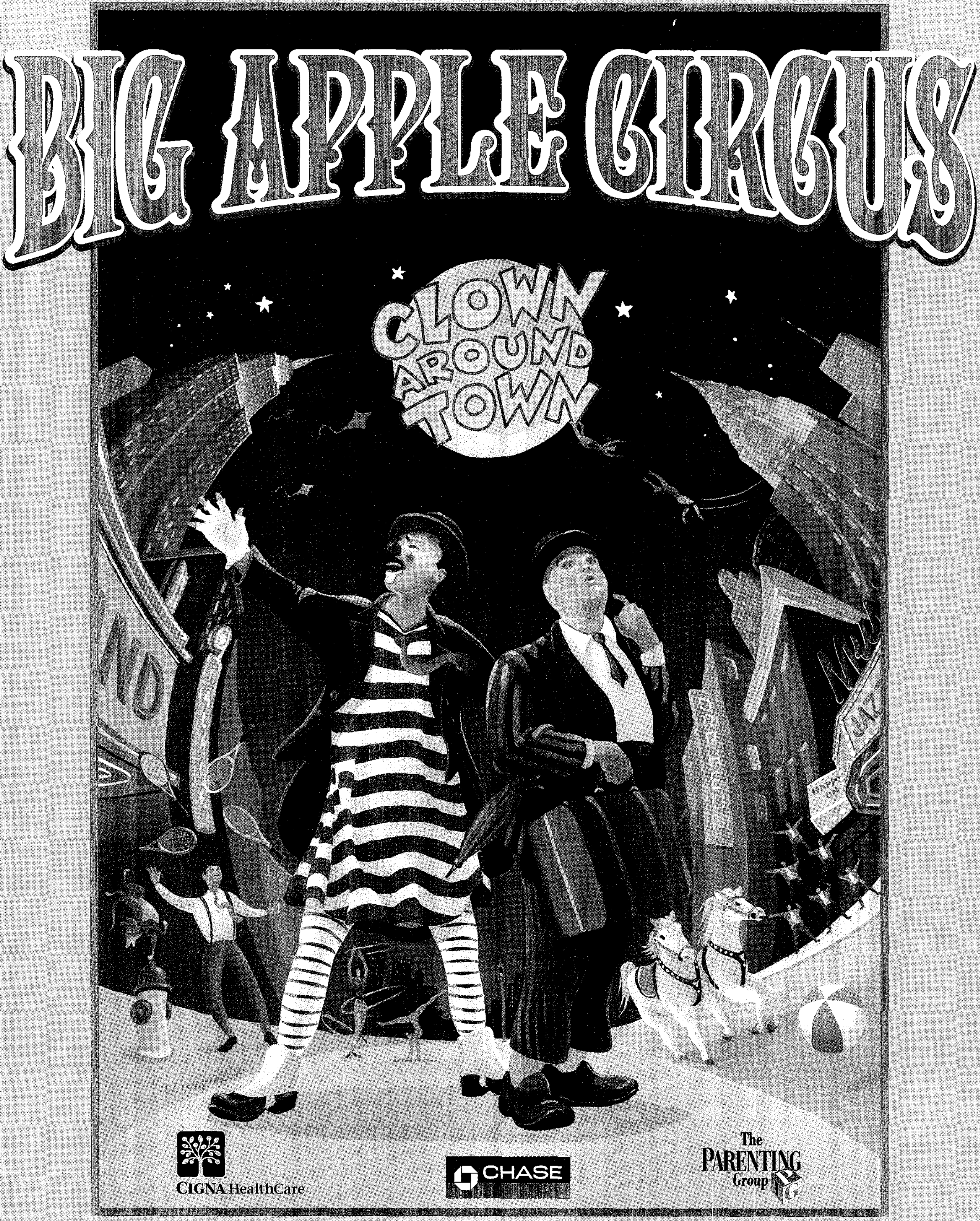
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Atlanta, GA	February–March 2001
Somerset County, NJ	March 2001
Boston, MA	March–May 2001
Queens, NY	May 2001
Brookville, NY	May–June 2001
To be announced	June 2001
Charlestown, RI	June–July 2001
Hanover, NH	July 2001
Shelburne, VT	July 2001

Schedule subject to change.

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> "...big top **heaven**"
>
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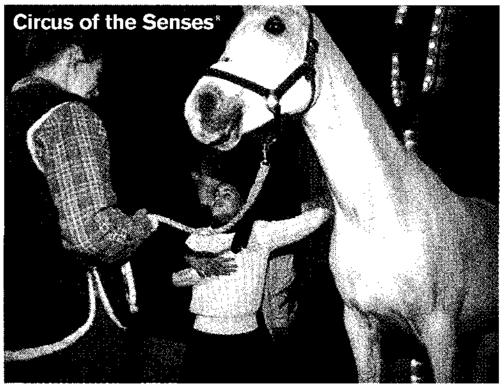

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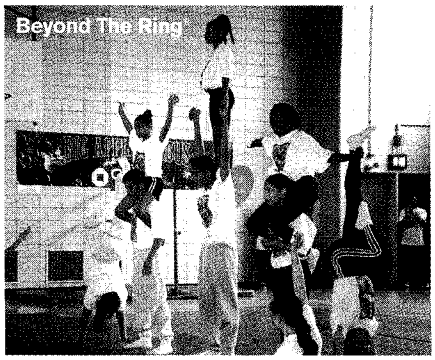

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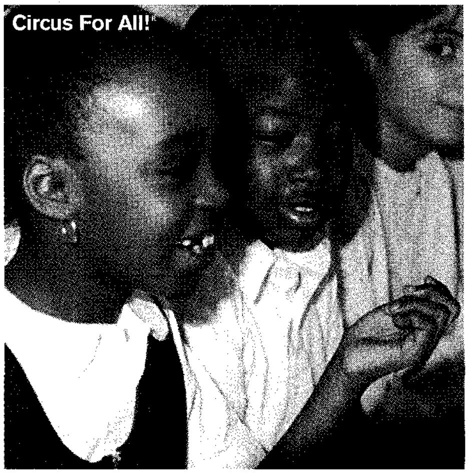

Circus For All!®

BIG APPLE CIRCUS

Clown Around Town

A New Show is Born

Getting French, British, Swiss, Polish, Danish, Moroccan, and Kazakh performers, along with a number of Americans, a South-African director, a French costume designer, various Arab stallions and dogs under one tent isn't easy. After some two years of working on their new show, "Clown Around Town" and following extensive rehearsals, Big Apple Circus—the only not-for-profit circus devoted to giving back to communities across the country—opened its tent to audiences just outside Washington, D.C. on September 21st. (Set to open at New York's Lincoln Center on October 19th, "Clown Around Town" will run through January 7th.)

Big Apple's creative team travelled to the circus festivals of Paris, Monte Carlo, and Budapest, visited other circuses here and abroad, and reviewed dozens of videotapes, before securing the best artists available. Pre-production meetings with the performance director, composer, choreographer, acrobatic trainer, designers, and key performers followed at New York's Lincoln Center.

This clownish U.N. then reconvened at their thirty-acre bucolic summer home, the Slifka Family Creative Center in Walden, New York, to rehearse under the center's Big Top, dance studio, and rehearsal ring. The wardrobe and the prop-shop bustled with activity. In the maintenance shops, crews repaired, repainted, fixed, and refurbished everything from the Lincoln Center Big Top to the plethora of show-owned caravans, trucks, motor homes, and utility trailers. Live, original music soared from the rehearsal space. In the Big Top, electricians focused the show's 252 lights used, and programmed hundreds of lighting cues. A seamless mixture of hard work, problem-solving, creative brainstorming, and practice, practice, practice ensued until the dress rehearsal of September 12th. Then everyone—performers, band members, crew, support personnel, (horses and dogs)—packed and departed for Washington, D.C.

It was a busy two years, but on October 19th, "Clown Around Town" will give its first New York City performance at Lincoln Center. In this story of a "city clown" and a "country clown," Orville T. Bleatwell, the country clown (played by Tom Dougherty, pictured at left), arrives in the Big City to visit his cousin, the city clown, Mr. Gordoon (played by Jeff Gordon). As one could well imagine, audiences can anticipate a barrage of antics as Dougherty and Gordon take us on a whimsical tour of "the city" as seen through the eyes of the Big Apple Circus.

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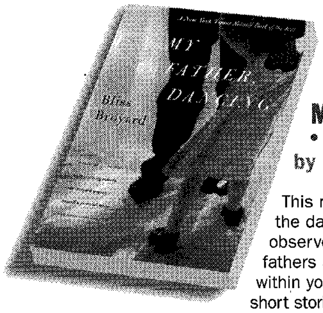

MY FATHER, DANCING

by Bliss Broyard

This noteworthy debut collection by the daughter of critic Anatole Broyard observes the delicate balance between fathers and daughters and the conflicts within young women themselves. These short stories about trying on roles, observing male behavior and forging relationships present delicate but powerful insight into the female psyche. (Harvest)

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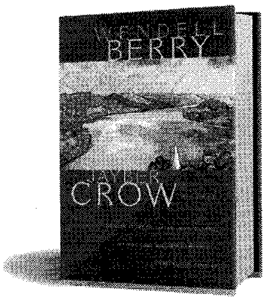

JAYBER CROW

by Wendell Berry

For thirty-nine years, Wendell Berry has chronicled the goings-on in the fictional community of Port William, Kentucky. In this new novel, the town's law-abiding barber, Jayber Crow, steps out of his role as an observer and into the spotlight to tell his story and reveal a lifetime of unrequited love for Mattie Chatam. (Counterpoint Books)

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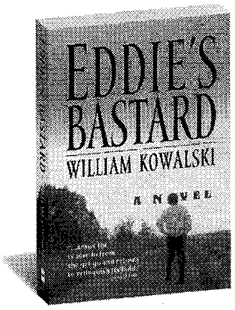

EDDIE'S BASTARD

by William Kowalski

The illegitimate son of an unknown mother and a pilot killed in Vietnam, Billy Mann is found on the doorstep of his reclusive grandfather's home. Raised by the old man according to family lore and with hearty helpings of fried baloney sandwiches, Billy learns that he is destined for greatness as one in a long line of risk-taking Irish-Americans. (HarperPerennial)

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AN EMPIRE OF WOMEN

by Karen Shepard

As a child, Cameron was the subject of a series of controversial portraits taken by her grandmother, a renowned French-Chinese photographer. When the two reunite, a long-held family secret is revealed and years of suffocated emotions come to the surface. (Putnam)

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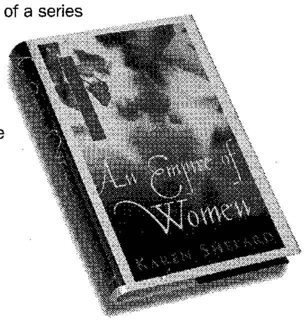

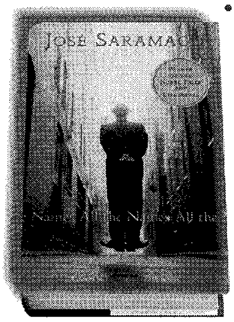

ALL THE NAMES

by José Saramago

In his latest novel, this Nobel Prize-winning author presents the tale of a middle-aged bachelor who seems indifferent to everything except the certificates he handles in the city's Central Registry and his growing obsession with an anonymous young woman. In this tender parable, Senhor Jose's obsession is a microcosm for the possibilities and disappointments in everyday life. (Harcourt)

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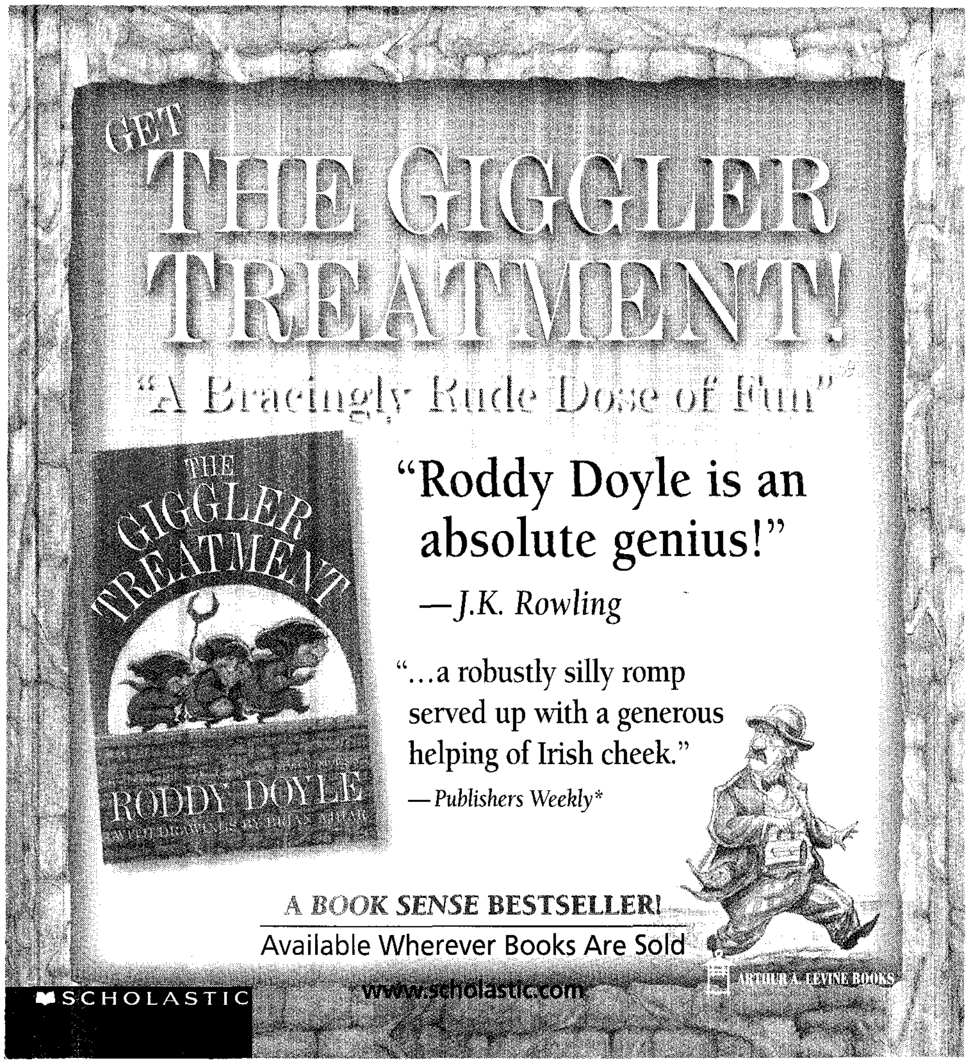
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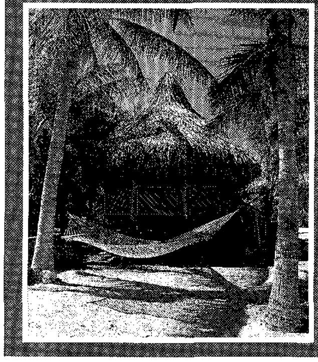
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I dream of thatched-roof days
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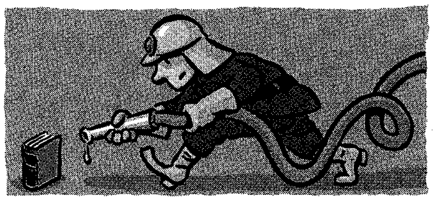
Blazing Away

When Murray Taylor's memoir, **JUMPING FIRE** (Harcourt), begins, he is a fifty-year-old firefighter in Alaska who specializes in smoke jumping—a dangerous procedure that involves parachuting into the center of a fire and defeating it from within. Despite repeated resolutions to make each year his last on the job, Murray continues to re-up, and he defies death for eight additional years. In terrifying, grimly funny descriptions of partially opening parachutes and travel across the scorched forest floor ("too slow and you burn to death, too fast and you fall and burn to death"), Taylor paints an affectionate portrait of a fraternity of daredevils who seem like "the outcome of some secret government testosterone experiment gone bad."



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

The life of the smoke jumper was most famously celebrated in Norman Maclean's **YOUNG MEN AND FIRE** (Chicago). Now Maclean's son John has revisited the subject in **FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN** (Morrow), an account of the deadly South Canyon fire, in Colorado in 1994. By scrutinizing the position and condition of melted backpacks and dropped chainsaws, Maclean re-creates the last moments of the fourteen men and women who died.

The study of fiery debris is also the subject of **BLAZE**, by Nicholas Faith (St. Martin's). With references to such famous conflagrations as the Triangle Shirtwaist fire and the Meridian Building fire, in Philadelphia, Faith demonstrates how seemingly trivial pieces of information (whether a hinge found in the ash was open or closed, for example) can help forensic investigators understand how a fire started and spread. "You have to be innately curious," says one investigator. Or, as a volunteer fireman charged with battling the recent Western wildfires explained, "You have to almost like fire to be a fireman."

—*Leo Carey*

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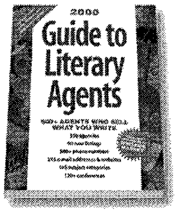

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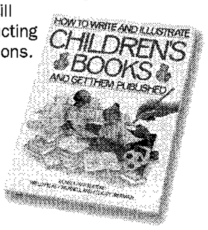

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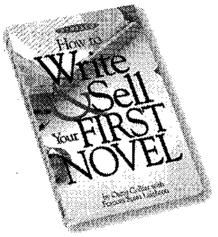

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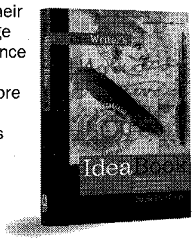

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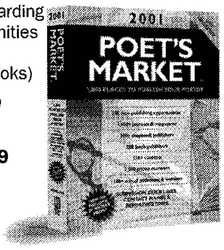

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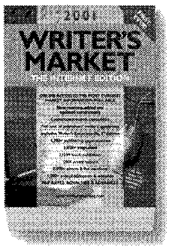

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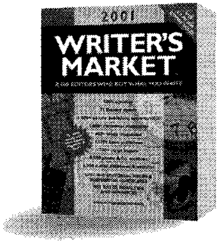

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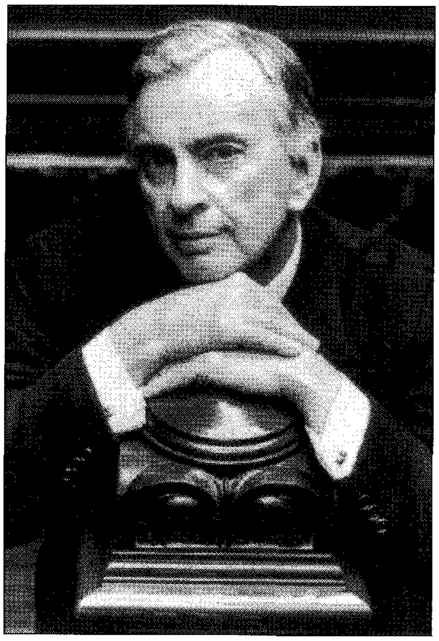

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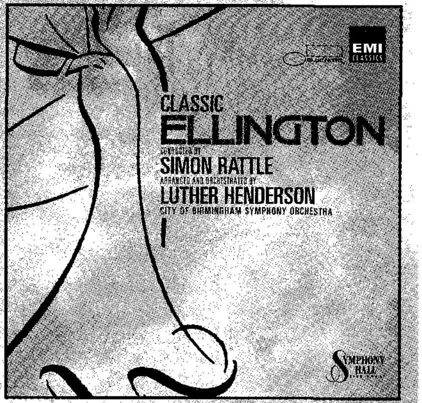

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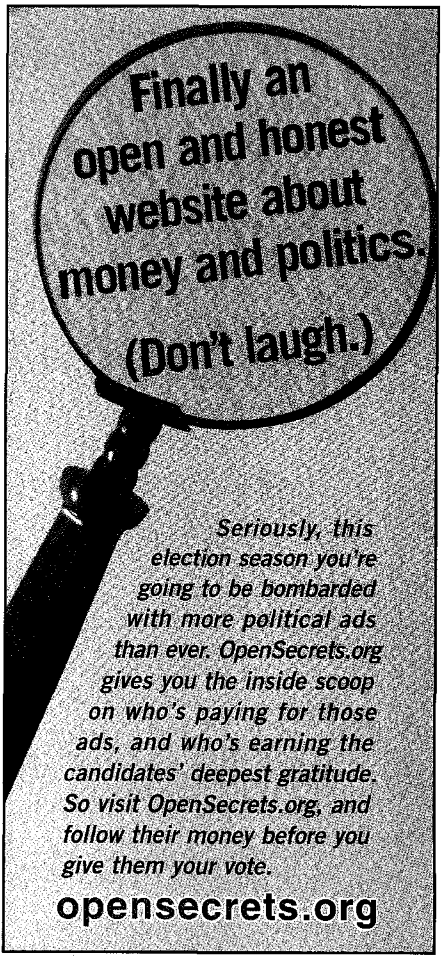

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The chamber ensemble presents works by Martinů, Dvořák, and Bach. (Coldon Center, Queens College, Flushing. 718-793-8080. Oct. 1 at 2.)

"BRASS MONDAYS"
The Hora Decima Brass Ensemble, featuring David Taylor on bass trombone, presents works by Gabrieli, Brahms, Cheetham, Stravinsky, and Ewazen. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 213 W. 82nd St. Oct. 2 at 7:30. Admission by contribution.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
Jens Nygaard conducts a program of Joachim Raff, featuring Jun Lin on piano. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. Oct. 2 at 2 and 7 and Oct. 3 at 8.)

EIGHTH BLACKBIRD
The Wallace Stevens-inspired ensemble presents works by David Lang, Daniel Kellogg, George Crumb, Joan Tower, and Frederick Rzewski. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Oct. 3 at 8.)

COMPOSERS CONCORDANCE
Five of György Ligeti's scintillating piano études (played by Judith Olson), inspired by the rhythms of African music, anchor a diverse program of new works by Lee Hyla, Jonathan Kramer, and others. (Frederick Loewe Theatre, New York University, 35 W. 4th St. 564-4899. Oct. 3 at 8)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

OUT OF TOWN
Though the *New Yorker* writer Brendan Gill and the poet and New Directions founder James Laughlin are well known for their literary achievements, a tender regional exhibition at the Norfolk Historical Society, in northwestern Connecticut, focusses instead on the personal realm. The primary attraction here is six decades of witty and heartfelt correspondence (the two men struck up a friendship in 1936 and remained close until their deaths, in 1997), as well as photographs and objects from the lives of both men. The "Leisure" section of the show features a bag of Laughlin's well-worn golf balls alongside the rusty rake that Gill wielded for many a Norfolk autumn. (13 Village Green, Norfolk, Connecticut. 860-542-5761. Open weekends from noon to four, or by appointment. Through Oct. 29.) ♦ In a related event on Sept. 30 at 4, the writer George Plimpton will speak about the two men. (Greenwoods Theatre, 20 Greenwoods Rd., Norfolk, Connecticut. For reservations, which are required, call 860-542-5075.)

READINGS
Oct. 1 at 3: By the poets Paul Violi and Shelley Stenhouse. (Posman Books, One University Pl. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Oct. 2 at 7:30: By the poets Timothy Liu and Rodney Phillips. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Oct. 2 at 8: By Robert Pinsky, Derek Walcott, Seamus Heaney, Frank Bidart, and other poets, from the work of Robert Lowell. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

MORE TALKS
Sept. 28 at 8: The talk-show host Charlie Rose interviews Gore Vidal, whose play "The Best Man" is currently in production. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.) ♦ Oct. 1 at 2: Following a screening of "The Tall T," the director Budd Boetticher and his longtime screenwriting partner Burt Kennedy discuss their work. (American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria. 718-784-0077.) ♦ Oct. 3 at 6: Leonard Lopate, host of the radio show "New York and Company," talks with the novelist William T. Vollmann. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 930-0571.)

Serenade in C Major for String Orchestra. (Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Ave. at 27th St. For tickets, call 201-217-2628. Sept. 27 at 8.)

RECITALS

VLADIMIR FELTSMAN
The pianist performs Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier (Book I)." (Mannes Concert Hall, 150 W. 85th St. 496-8524. Sept. 27 at 8.)

LARA ST. JOHN AND PETER BRUNS
The violinist joins the German cellist for a program of Martinů, Ravel, Kodály, and Handel. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Sept. 27 at 8.)

CHING-WEN HSIAO AND IAN PARKER
An hour-long concert by a pair of young, award-winning pianists. (Paul Hall, at Juilliard, 60 Lincoln Center Plaza. Sept. 27 at 9. No tickets necessary.)

BARGEMUSIC
Sept. 28 and Sept. 30 at 7:30: Guitarist Simon Wynberg, violist Tania Susi, and cellist Inbal Segev join violinists Mark Peskanov and Jennifer Trahan for a program that includes Haydn's String Quartet in G Minor (the "Rider"), Paganini's Sonata No. 12 in E Minor for Violin and Guitar, and Boccherini's Quintet for Guitar and Strings in D Major, as well as some of Schubert's songs, arranged for solo guitar. ♦ Sept. 29 at 7:30 and Oct. 1 at 4: Pianist Edward Auer, violinist Peskanov, and cellist Ronald Thomas offer Beethoven's Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Major, Schumann's Fantasy Pieces for Cello and Piano, and Schubert's Piano Trio in E-Flat Major (Op. 100). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

CELEBRATING LOUIS ANDRIESSEN
The Ensemble Sospeso, with Jeffrey Milarsky conducting and pianist Tomoko Mukaiyama taking the solos, gives the Dutch avant-garde composer his due with a program of three of his works—"Workers Union" (1975), "Nietzsche Redet" (1989), and "Tao" (1996). (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Sept. 28 at 8. ♦ **Note:** The composer will be on hand an hour before the concert to discuss his work.)

NOONDAY CONCERT SERIES
Sept. 28 at 1: The Hinds, Ingram, Lawrence, Russo Ensemble presents an eclectic program of works by Mozart, Gounod, Verdi, Puccini, Bizet, Bernstein, and Sondhiem. (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. Admission by contribution.) ♦ Oct. 2 at noon: The mezzo-soprano Beatrice Beer, accompanied by the pianist Kelly Horsted, offers arias from operas by her father, Joseph Beer. (St. Paul's Chapel, Broadway at Fulton St. Admission by contribution.)

JULI BORST
The mezzo-soprano, who can often be found singing for the early-music ensemble ARTEK, performs songs by Haydn and Schubert, accompanied by Gwendolyn Toth, who will be playing a replica of an eighteenth-century fortepiano. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. Sept. 28 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

ELIZABETH RICH
The pianist, taking the stage in New York City for the first time in seven years, performs an all-Mozart program. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Sept. 28 at 8.)

QIANG TU AND HELENE D. JEANNEY
Tu, a cellist with the New York Philharmonic, is accompanied by the pianist Jeanney for an afternoon of Beethoven, Tcherepnin, Shostakovich, and Paganini. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Sept. 30 at 2.)

BACHWORKS
Harpsichordist Anthony Newman and his ensemble open the season with three celebratory cantatas by J. S. Bach. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. Sept. 30 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

"SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND"
In the parlor of a way-uptown B. and B., violinists Tomoko Katsura and Ilan Rechtman offer a recital of Beethoven, Saint-Säens, and Wieniawski. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Oct. 1 at noon.)

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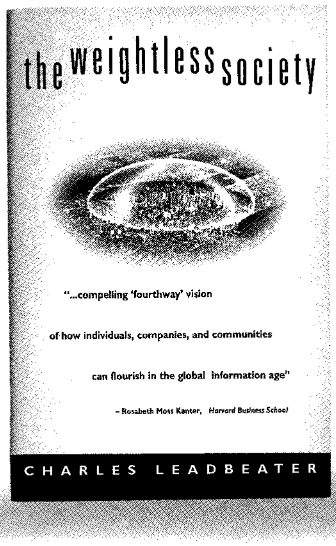

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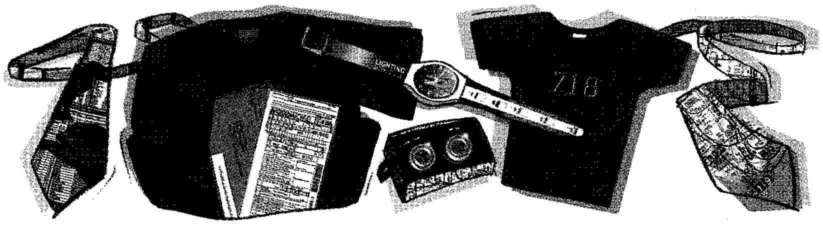


Once confined to foam-rubber Statue of Liberty crowns, ill-fitting baseball caps, and endless variations on the "I ♥ NY" T-shirt, New York City-themed apparel has recently been rejuvenated, thanks to some expansive thinking by local merchants.

At the **TRANSIT MUSEUM STORE** (878-0106) in Grand Central Station, the main attraction is the selection of T-shirts emblazoned with the brightly colored, alphanumeric codes of the subway lines. (One of the most popular, the orange-on-black F-train shirt, even made an appearance in the recent teen film "Bring It On" as indisputable proof of a character's cool.) The store carries a large inventory of related items, including a silk necktie with a reproduction of the New York City subway map ($35) and dignified suspenders that bear images of the famous Grand Central ceiling ($30). Subway tokens, already something of a curiosity in the Metrocard era, show up in a variety of incarnations: a T-shirt carries a picture of a single token, magnified to basketball-size proportions and starkly captioned "Token"; a silk tie is enlivened with a hail of coins which doubles as a history of the styles and sizes of tokens the Transit Authority has employed over the last century. The store has also worked a certain magic with the metal tokens themselves, fashioning them into money clips, earrings, and cuff links, as well as another bygone: the gentleman's stud set ($36).

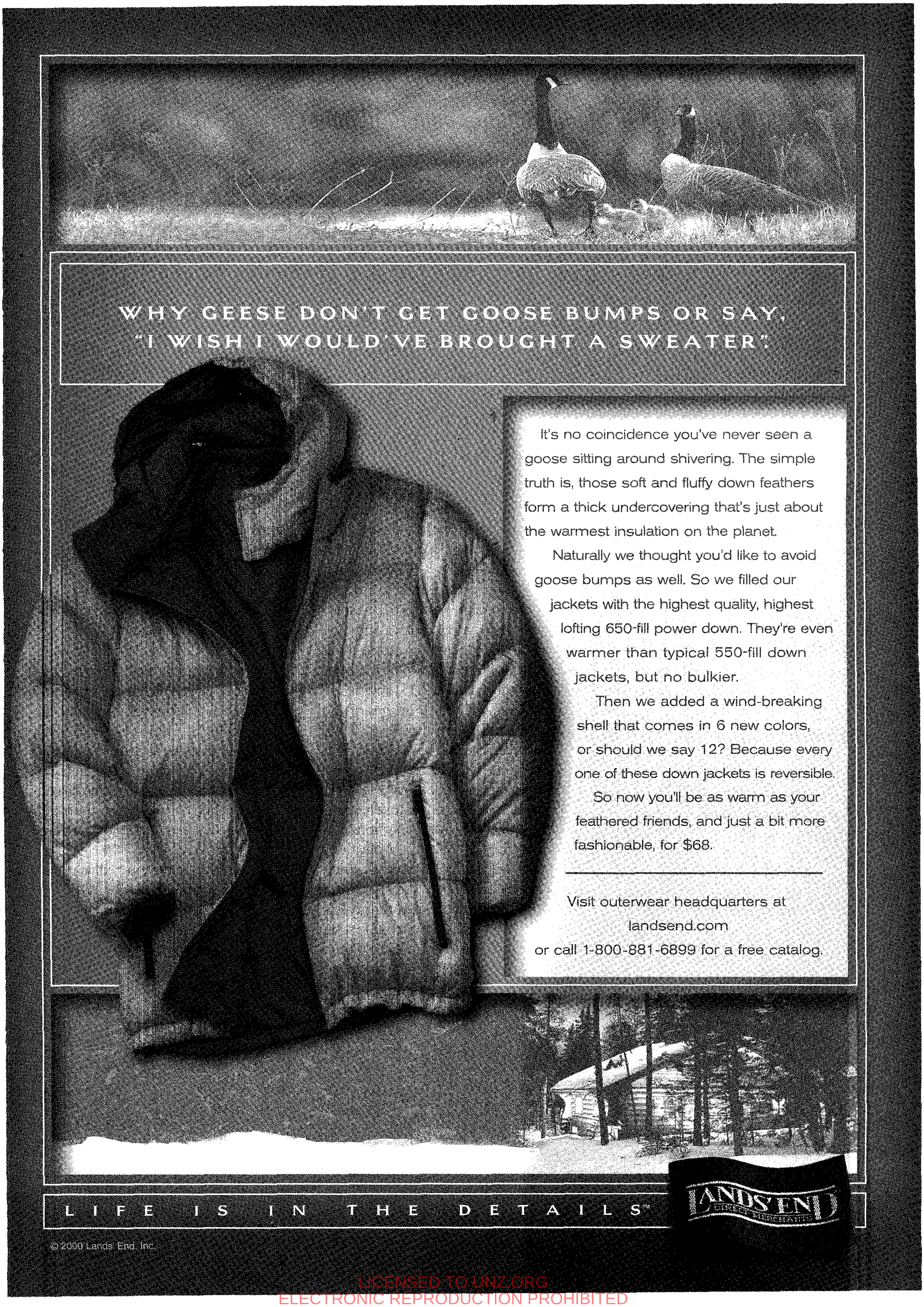
VILLAGE TIME (184 W. 4th St.; 989-4035), on a raucous stretch in the West Village, has a selection of more contemporary accessories, including a Swatch watch emblazoned with a likeness of the Empire State Building and a dial that tracks the monument's ever-shifting lighting schedule: azure in November for United Nations Day, lavender in June for Gay Pride Day, and so on ($50). The splashy cravats at Village Time, created by a woman who works at the shop and calls her company Bobbie Ties, include an over-the-top bejewelled number with a goofy bear and bull superimposed on a stock ticker. Bobbie will also accept special commissions for beaded variations on other urban themes (around $40). Architectural drawings by McKim, Mead, and White enliven an ecru Nicole Miller silk scarf whose pattern includes a rendering of the old Penn Station beautiful enough to pierce the heart of the fiercest anti-preservationist ($100).

Cosmopolitan wit informs the stock at the **NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY** (2 W. 77th St., at Central Park West; 873-3400), where a miniature bundle of the New York *Times*, an inch by an inch and a half, has been transformed into a brooch ($6.95). (The headline reads "Stocks Plunge," and though the date is too small to read, all signs point to the plunge of October, 1929.) Similarly, a tiny replica of a certain weekly magazine with the likeness of Eustace Tilley on the cover is now a tie tack ($5.95).

You can travel to the rarefied world of suspenders and tie tacks, but if you're collecting a full complement of citywear, you'll eventually end up back in the land of T-shirts. **REFINERY**, in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn (254 Smith St.; 718-643-7861), has an extensive line of tanks and tees decorated with a simple 718, in honor of the borough's area code. At **BURKINA** (177 E. Houston St.; 460-9348), a self-described "World-Famous Hip Hop Shop" on the fringes of the East Village, a classic short-sleeved shirt bears bad news on its chest: a larger-than-life version of a New York City traffic ticket, issued to a luckless soul called Hoodache and signed by none other than Officer Crupkey ($20).

—*Lynn Yaeger*

EDEL RODRIGUEZ



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RINEKE DIJKSTRA
Dijkstra's first U.S. solo show, "Tiergarten," offers a series of portraits taken largely in the Berlin park of the same name. As her first critically successful project, "Beaches," did, "Tiergarten" places adolescents in an ambiguously natural-seeming environment; as with "Beaches," there is never any question of including a child who is less than beautiful. Through Oct. 28. (Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.)

MICHAEL KENNA
A range of Kenna's nocturnal work is on show here, with pictures of St. Petersburg, Prague, Calais, and San Francisco, among other cities. Through Oct. 21. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 989-7600.)

AMY STEINER
The thirty-six snapshot-like color pictures in "Sensory Memory" hang in four grids of nine works each, one batch predominantly red (subjects include a slice of watermelon), one yellow (subjects include a beach towel), one green (subjects include grass), and one blue (subjects include water and sky). The arrangements look good, but they make it difficult to see whether, or how, each picture might stand on its own. Through Oct. 14. (Rare, 435 W. 14th St. 645-5591.)

JAMES WELLING
Welling began his career as a student of the conceptual photographer John Baldessari, but his style has continued to change, ranging from traditional landscapes to abstract still-lifes of broken glass on velvet. This exhibition includes four projects, two of which stand out particularly: Polaroid interiors from the late seventies, with color sweetened by heating and refrigeration during processing; and recent "New Abstractions," large-format, digitally manipulated black-and-white work that recalls both modernist photographs of industrial architecture and the abstract paintings of Kazimir Malevich. Through Oct. 7. (Gorney, Bravin and Lee, 534 W. 26th St. 352-8372.)

TOM WOOD
The Liverpudlian Wood has been photographing his adopted city's buses and their passengers for nearly twenty years, in black-and-white and color, from the street and from on board. His literally and figuratively reflective images of these public vehicles, with their panoramic windows on the street, offer a thoughtful, contemporary antidote to several generations of more predictable, romanticized pictures of trains, planes, and cars. Through Nov. 4. (Erben, 516 W. 20th St. 645-8701.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—**"Positions in the Life World"** surveys Martha Rossler's funny, politically charged photos and videos, including such classics as her 1975 film, "Semiotics of the Kitchen." Through Oct. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

MILES COOLIDGE
Kaplan, 416 W. 14th St. 645-7335.
Through Oct. 7.

PINO DAL GAL
De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.
Through Oct. 28.

ROBERT FRANK
Scalo, 560 Broadway. 334-9393.
Through Oct. 21.

JENNY GAGE
Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St.
206-9100. Through Oct. 14.

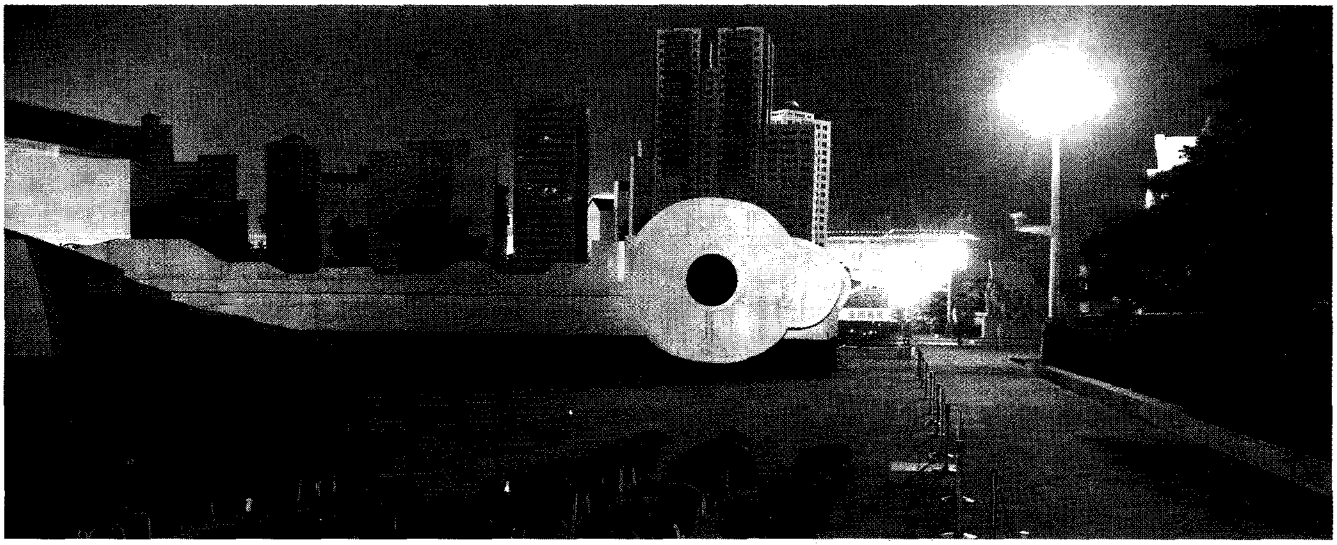
SHEILA METZNER
Stevenson, 338 W. 23rd St.
352-0070. Through Oct. 21.

JOEL MEYEROWITZ
Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway. 625-3434.
Through Oct. 21.

ROBERT POLIDORI
Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.
Through Oct. 14.

BERT TEUNISSEN
Gallery 24, at 552 W. 24th St.
414-0370. Through Oct. 4.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum and the Whitney Museum.



Lois Conner's "Tiananmen, Beijing, October 2, 1999," from her series on China, at Miller (see Photography).

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
More Met openings this week, including the season première of Debussy's **Pelléas et Mélisande**, featuring Dwayne Croft and Susanne Mentzer in the title roles, Nadine Denize as Geneviève, José van Dam as Golaud, and Robert Lloyd as King Arkel; conducted by James Levine. (Sept. 27 at 8 and Sept. 30 at 8.) ♦ A Saturday-matinée première of **Turandot**, with production and set designs by Franco Zeffirelli. The cast includes Sharon Sweet as Turandot, Cristina Callardo-Domas, Richard Margison, and Paul Plishka; Marco Armiliato. (Sept. 30 at 1:30 and Oct. 4 at 8.) ♦ Continuing performances of **Samson et Dalila**, with Plácido Domingo (Sept. 29 at 8 and Oct. 3 at 7:30), and **Don Giovanni**, with Renée Fleming (Sept. 28 at 8 and Oct. 2 at 7:30). (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Oct. 3 at 7:30: Benjamin Britten's 1954 adaptation of Henry James's ghost story "The Turn of the Screw," featuring the soprano Amy Burton in the role of the governess, returns to the company's repertoire. Stewart Robertson conducts. ♦ Sept. 28 at 7:30 and Oct. 4 at 7:30: Donizetti's "Roberto Devereux," with soprano Lauren Flanigan in the role of Queen Elizabeth and a cast that also includes mezzo-soprano Jane Dutton, tenor Fernando De La Mora, and baritone Mark Delavan; conducted by George Manahan. ♦ Sept. 26 at 7:30 and Sept. 30 at 8: "La Traviata," with Mary Dunleavy, Bruce Fowler, and Stephen Powell; Joseph Rescigno. ♦ Sept. 27 at 7:30 and Oct. 1 at 1:30: "Le Nozze di Figaro," with Sari Gruber (as Susanna), Pamela Armstrong (Countess Almaviva), Paula Rasmussen (Cherubino), Dean Ely (Figaro), and John Hancock (Count Almaviva); Steuart Bedford. ♦ Sept. 30 at 1:30: "Madama Butterfly." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Kurt Masur conducts the continuing Mendelssohn celebrations. Sept. 27-28 at 8, Sept. 29 at 11 A.M., and Oct. 3 at 7:30: The mezzo-soprano Margaret Lattimore is featured in a performance of the complete incidental music to "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The program includes four Mendelssohn choral works, performed a cappella by the American Boychoir and directed by James Litton. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S
Sir Simon Rattle re-creates a concert of classic Ellington works (the original event, last November, was recorded by EMI/Blue Note) with the vocalist Dianne Reeves and a topnotch band that includes Bobby Watson on alto sax, Joe Lovano on tenor sax, Wycliffe Gordon on trombone, Regina Carter on violin, Clark Terry on trumpet, and Geri Allen on piano. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Sept. 28 at 8.)

CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
Maurizio Pollini appears at the opening-night benefit concert for Carnegie Hall's hundred-and-tenth season, along with the Cleveland Orchestra, conducted by Christoph von Dohnányi. The program includes Schumann's Symphony No. 2 in C Major (Op. 61) and Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-Flat Major (Op. 83). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 3 at 7.)

LYRIC ORCHESTRA
The young ensemble (the players' average age is twenty-five) plays Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons," with violinist Georgy Valtchev, and Tchaikovsky's

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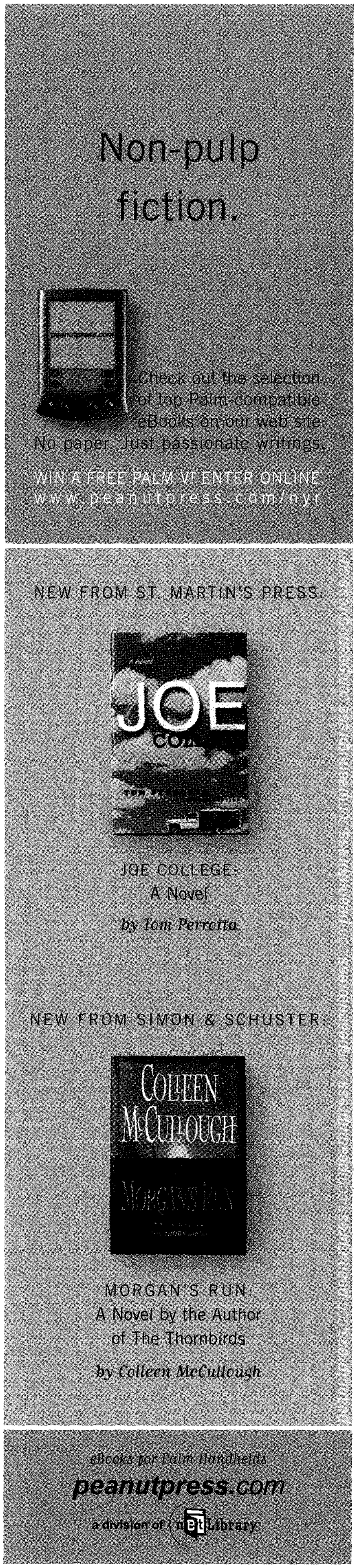
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across the twisted debris of her raft, holding a crucifix. On the horizon, sharks and lightning bolts approach. Little has changed, apparently, since Winslow Homer painted "Gulf Coast" a century ago. But the grim iconography is offset by Colescott's rollicking, chaotic composition, and by the cheerfully vast and radiant orange that sits at its center. Through Oct. 28. (Kind, 136 Greene St. 925-1200.)

NICOLA COSTANTINO
This Argentine artist has created a faux boutique and stocked it with familiar accoutrements—handbags, shoes, coats, dresses—made from an unfamiliar material: silicone casts of human skin, complete with multiple nipples, navels, and other salient features. In the back gallery is a more mysteriously elegant though comparably grotesque installation, cast from intertwined fetuses of colts, calves, and a piglet or two. Not a début one forgets, though its title, "Human Furrier," telegraphs a certain lack of subtlety. Through Oct. 7. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

NICOLE EISENMAN
A helicopter crashes in Antarctica, and the dazed male survivors are hunted down by a tribe of glamorous cannibal lesbians: who but Eisenman could offer us such sardonic sublimities, painted with a reckless but surprisingly deft hand? Characteristically, this show is laid out like a studio tour: first come drawings, clippings, and ephemera. Once she has set an appropriately raunchy, frivolous tone, the artist raises the stakes in larger and ever-goofier canvases, culminating in a thirty-foot mural of the anthropophagettes feasting in their icy lair. Through Oct. 14. (Tilton, 47 Greene St. 941-1775.)

MELISSA MEYER
Liquefaction is the theme of these five large abstract paintings, each a shallow pool of coiling, ideographic brushstrokes. Using oil paint almost as if it were watercolor, Meyer keys her palette to transparent blues and greens, which ripple and brighten with seductively sluggish rhythms. Though their lush, dissolving painterliness recalls both Monet's Nymphae and seventies-era de Koonings, Meyer's images are surprisingly distinctive, full of kinked lariats and eddies of grainy, nearly opalescent color. Through Oct. 28. (Platner, 113 Crosby St. 324-1298.)

Short List

MARCEL DZAMA / JOCKUM NORDSTRÖM
Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.
Through Oct. 7.

CHRISTINE HILL
Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232.
Through Oct. 14.

DO-HO SUH
Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.
Through Oct. 7.

CORBAN WALKER
Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St.
431-9224. Through Oct. 7.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Sept. 27: Fine Asian and Oriental carpets. ♦ Oct. 4: Continental furniture, decorations, and carpets. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Sept. 27: Continental furniture, tapestries, and ceramics. ♦ Sept. 21: Chinese works of art, including ceramics, bronzes, and paintings. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

MEGHAN BOODY
These thirteen pictures from the middle of Boody's "Psyche and Smut" series follow our heroine's adventures with her doppelgänger, Smut. Smut teaches Psyche to dress up, literally pulls her out of her cocoon, and commiserates when she sprouts a tail as a symbol of her growing animal appetites and abilities. Marginal, pedophilic nudes abound, as do bad rhymes and rhythms in the overlaid doggerel narrative. The digitally collaged prints must be intentionally tinny and unappealing, but that tactic works too well. Through Oct. 21. (Gering, 476 Broome St. 226-8195.)

LOIS CONNER
For most of the last fifteen years, Conner has been travelling in China with a seven-by-seventeen-inch panoramic camera. Her wide, black-and-white images present the conditions of contemporary Chinese life with the stark formality of traditional Chinese scrolls. One three-exposure composite of Hong Kong, with a hundred-and-eighty-degree view, uses hundreds of lifeless windows to suggest both the presence and absence of that island's densely packed population. A series on the lotus blossom links botanical photography with Asian iconography—pictures of the flower blooming and decaying in rural ponds hang alongside, and are echoed by, images of walls and gates decorated with its image. Through Oct. 28. (Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.)

TABLES FOR TWO

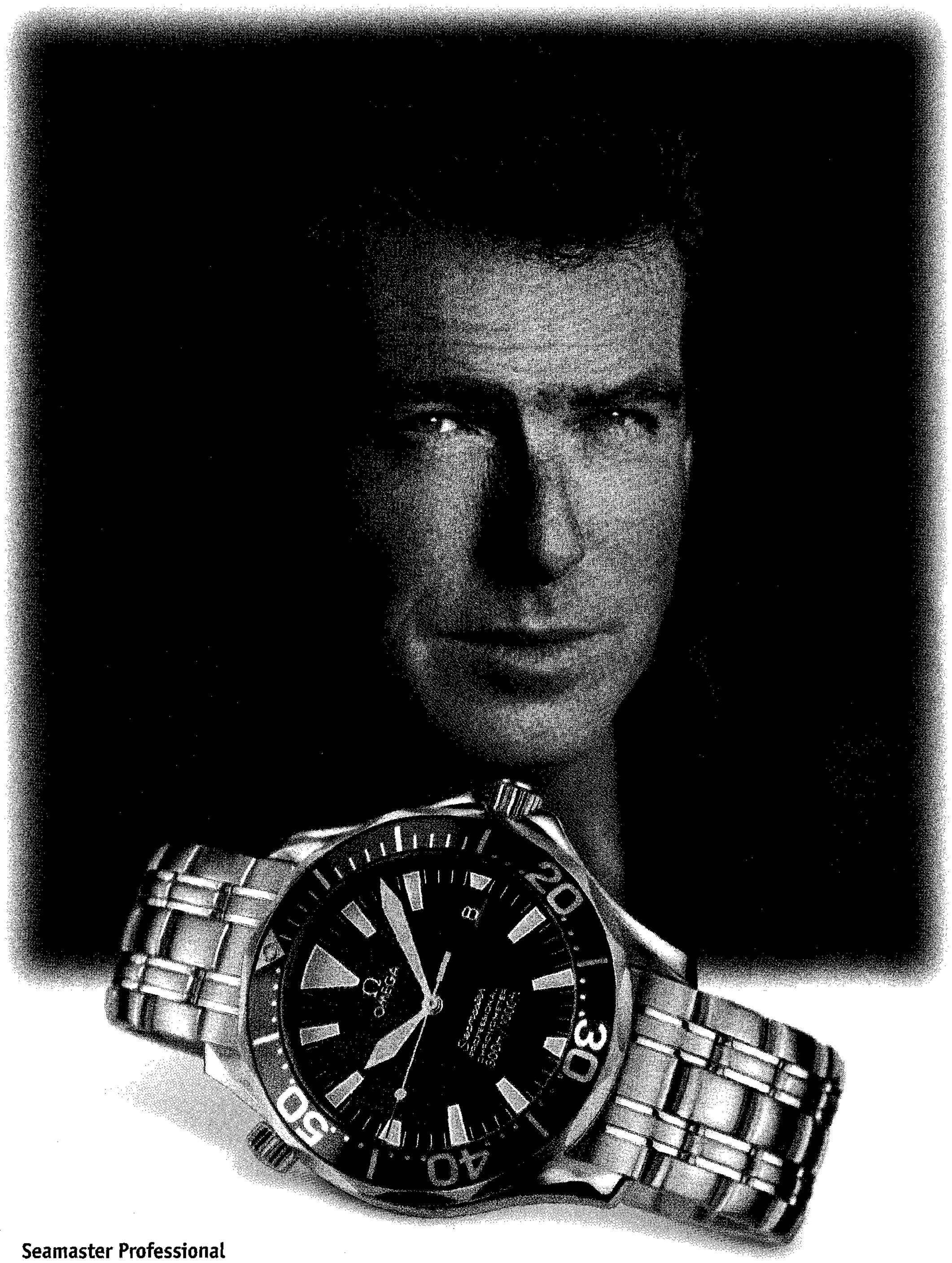
AZ
21 W. 17th St. (691-8888)—A night at this red-hot Asian-influenced eatery can be perplexing. Diners wait in the isolated vestibule or in bar-and-lounge darkness before being taken by an attendant to the rooftop dining room, in a blindingly lit stainless-steel elevator, like dissidents on the way to interrogation. The red-lanterned, exposed-brick room is clogged with waiters and waitresses bustling about in Chairman Mao shifts and fetishistically sexy, rust-colored mandarin dresses. The most intriguing element of the mixed-up, multiculti décor—the retractable sunroof ceiling—is really just a nice gimmick, until a rainstorm descends upon the neighborhood (in which case it closes). The unisex rest room is located next to the swinging kitchen doors, which on a recent night nearly coldcocked an innocent diner, who was then sternly chastised for "standing in the wrong place."

If you still have your wits about you by the time the food arrives, however, you'll feel like the winner on one of those reality-T.V. game shows. Thanks to the culinary alchemy of the chef, Patricia Yeo, the dining-room turbulence seems unimportant. Most of her appetizers are unusually precise in their balance of flavors—the miso-glazed sea bass, lemongrass-cured salmon with ossetra caviar, and grilled prawns with soybean wontons and tomato broth, in particular. Her most popular entrée is plain chicken smoked with Lapsang souchong tea, served alongside a scallion pancake and fig chutney. A double-cut pork chop arrives in fanned slices; it looks dull and possibly overcooked but tastes exceptionally moist with the flavor of Armagnac, and is accompanied by fat prunes macerated in oolong tea. And if you've never dared to have braised oxtails with your tuna, this is the place to make the leap.

The menu, which is prix fixe and changes daily, includes a lovingly selected (but cloyingly annotated) wine list and a nice array of single malts and whiskeys (Balvenie, Dalwhinnie, A.H. Hirsch). Some advice: splurge on an extra appetizer, and do not skip dessert, which you can always take home in a doggie bag (unless you order the de-luxe hot-fudge sundae, with coconut ice cream, macadamia praline, and rum whipped cream). (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, weekends for dinner only. Prix fixe $57.)

—*Emily Nunn*

Pierce
Brosnan's Choice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notes shift from philosophical musings to grisly drowning statistics to literary references, ranging from Dickens to Dickinson (long a source for the artist). Though there is no narrative, there is a sequence. The playful self-consciousness of the text ("I will wonder (in another footnote) if the darkness in the Thames is London") owes much to Nabokov circa "Pale Fire." Through Jan. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes, and Rage"** presents videos, clothing and accessories, manuscripts of lyrics, F.B.I. letters, magazine covers, and installations that catalogue reactions to the genre. Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

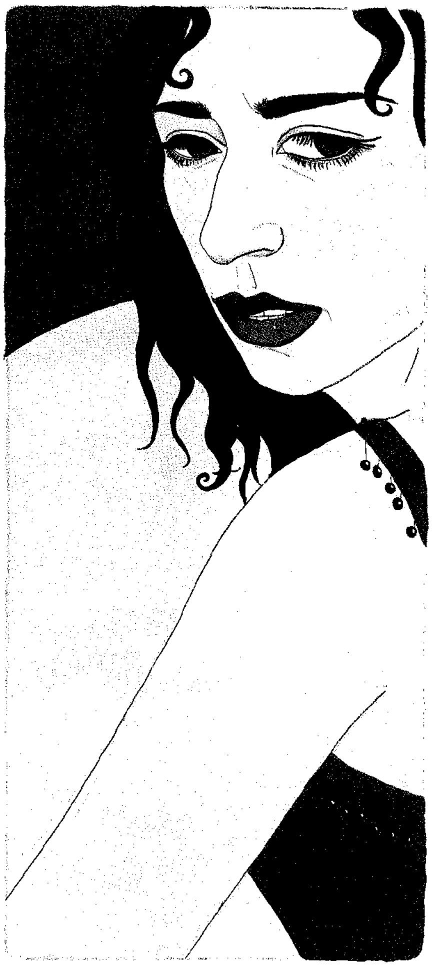
COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (849-8300)—**"The Opulent Eye of Alexander Girard."** This exuberant American designer is probably best known as the inventor of the sunken living room, variously called a "conversation pit" or "love pit," depending on your mood (an unsunken facsimile is included in the show). While Girard does not rank in the design pantheon alongside his friends (and sometime collaborators) Charles and Ray Eames, the brilliant colorist gave the neutrality of modernism a self-described "irrational frivolity." The designer's two greatest passions, the art of the meal and folk art (he inspired the Eameses in their use of ethnic objects), were combined in his celebrated design for the restaurant La Fonda del Sol, housed in the Time-Life Building from 1961 to 1974. Too bad the name Fiestaware was already taken; it perfectly sums up the happy spirit of Girard's table settings for the restaurant, one of the high points of this lively show. Through March 18. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS
548 W. 22nd St. (989-5566)—For his modestly titled **"Project,"** Jorge Pardo has revamped the museum's entire first floor, now expanded to ten thousand square feet. The piece is divided into three distinct areas: a lobby, sporting new glass-and-steel doors (not to mention lockers); an exhibition space; and a bookstore so loungelike it may supplant Gavin Brown's bar as the hip hangout in Chelsea. A quarter-acre of colored tiles, fabricated in Mexico in a retro-chic palette of light blue, yellow, orange, and avocado, cover the floor and columns. In the exhibition space the original, full-scale, clay-colored model for the new VW bug stands alone, like a sacred icon in a temple of modern design. The lobby and bookshop are permanent (or at least "long term"). The exhibition, which will alter over the course of the next two years, runs through June 17. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

IAN DAWSON
This young British artist tilts at art-world windmills (readymades, Abstract Expressionism), but with an unusually powerful weapon: a blowtorch. In his hands, everyday plastic objects—lawn chairs, garbage pails, coat hangers—are transformed into coagulated abstract sculptures that have the colorful, roiling surface of a painting. Some of the choreographed disasters have a John-Chamberlain-at-K-mart feel, though the gallery would prefer that you think of Pollock: a remarkable 1944 drawing by the drip master has been placed near one of Dawson's sculptures in the back room. The show includes two large-scale drawings created with the children's toy Spirograph. Their intricate arabesques seem at once mechanical and molecular, and they manage both to offset the visceral sculptures and to underscore their atmosphere of controlled chaos. Through Oct. 7. (James Cohan Gallery, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)



Marisa Monte, at the Beacon Theatre.

GREGORY GILLESPIE
This memorial exhibition reminds us of the vibrant intensity of Gillespie's best work, which matches psychedelic fantasy with manic verisimilitude, suggesting a collaboration between Andrew Wyeth and R. Crumb. Highlights include one of the rarely seen "trattoria" paintings, made in Rome in the sixties, and two of the massive shrine paintings of the early nineties, bedecked with trompe-l'oeil tools and fruit. Among the most recent works are a sculptural tomb, designed to contain Gillespie's ashes, and "Self-Portrait, Triumphant," which seems to belie the artist's suicide last April, at the age of sixty-four. Through Sept. 30. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

Short List

ALAN BRAY
Schmidt-Bingham, 41 E. 57th St.
888-1122. Through Sept. 30.

DANIEL GARCÍA
Galeria Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St.
644-9090. Through Oct. 7.

NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE
Rickards, 1045 Madison Ave., at 79th St.
924-0858. Through Oct. 14.

EDWARD SOREL
Davis & Langdale, 231 E. 60th St. 838-0333.
Through Sept. 29.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MATTHEW BENEDICT
Benedict, who has dabbled before in inventing and documenting fictional characters and recasting figures from the tarot deck, combines these interests in a series of small, detailed friezes peopled with action figures. In the center of the room, figures from the tarot's major arcana dance along a slim table, their bendable limbs stilled, their new costumes a marble-like off-white. Other miniatures decorate a mantelpiece and a clock face, and larger toys appear as well: the shell of what seems to be Skeletor's Castle Greyskull provides the base for one piece, while elsewhere ominous bits of a wrecked model ship trim the edge of a small mirror. In the back room, a lone tiny tough guy on a mini-motorcycle rides down a thin, balance-beam-like table frame, off into the great toy unknown—the floor. Through Oct. 14. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474.)

ALICE NEEL
This fine show, a coda to the Whitney retrospective, spotlights the last five years of Neel's life. Her keyed-up palette and jaunty draftsmanship never left her, though one feels the creeping loss of energy. The backgrounds drop away, and then, in the last year, so do the bodies: "Nancy and Olivia," from 1984, shows us two cardboard-flat dress patterns from which beautifully solid heads and calves emerge. Among the images of celebrity sitters, the portrait of Ed Koch is a disappointment, while Gus Hall's is a triumph. The aging blue-eyed Communist, who sat for Neel in 1981, wears a fur cap and an expression of willed, genial stoicism, as if he saw the lean years looming. Through Oct. 14. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774.)

CHARLES SPURRIER
Spurrier makes art on the wall, on welded frames, and for some reason he has been billed as a savior of contemporary painting. In fact, his ebulliently patterned, sometimes lacy, tape-laminated work looks more like assemblage or printmaking. Some of them could easily be sold as sculpture or installation—for instance, the show's star piece, half-covered with brightly colored Christmas lights, and visible through the gallery window. Through Oct. 14. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.)

NINA STEN-KNUDSEN
"The Landscape, Later" includes a vitrine of relics of Western civilization—some bad drawings, a tattered Marlboro ad, a scout knife, a porcelain doll, a Polaroid or two. The suggestion that we may not be remembered as we'd like is driven home by Sten-Knudsen's huge, sepia-toned, postapocalyptic landscapes. Darkened cities burn with innumerable fires, country earth sends up smoke and steam, and the odd memory of culture survives: in one of several double images, a group portrait—is it of striking coal miners, or Buffalo Bill and his wild bunch?—hovers, ghostly gray, in front of a desolate and unpeopled scene. Through Oct. 14. (DCA, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-5511.)

Short List

LOUISE FISHMAN
Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St.
242-7727. Through Oct. 21.

UDOMSAK KRISANAMIS
Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St.
627-5258. Through Oct. 7.

PAT PASSLOF
Harris, 529 W. 20th St. 463-9666.
Through Oct. 7.

MEG WEBSTER
Paula Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.
Through Oct. 14.

RACHEL WHITEREAD
Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St.
206-9100. Through Oct. 14.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ROBERT COLESCOTT
Now well into his seventies, the painter of "George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware" continues to make gleeful, anarchic, racially flavored provocations. The show's most topical image, "Florida," shows a spindly black woman, presumably a Haitian refugee, sprawled

LARA TOMLIN

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JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Sept. 28: The soulful, bluesy sound of the Malian troubadour **Boubacar Traoré**, making his first appearance in New York City in two decades.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Sept. 27: The multi-instrumentalist **Mary Timony**, who once led the seminal indie-rock band Helium. With **Nina Nastasia**, a singer-songwriter with an achingly lonesome voice and a dark, dark sensibility. Her new record, "Dogs," is rich with cello, accordion, violin, piano, and guitar, and is wrapped in perhaps the most attractive booklet (letterpress lyrics, a hand-mounted snapshot) in recent memory. Sept. 30: The ancient European psychedelic collective **Gong**.

LIMELIGHT
Sixth Ave. at 20th St. (807-7780)—Sept. 30: The disk jockey and producer **Mocean Worker** isn't really named Mocean Worker; he was born Adam Dorn, and before he became a mastermind of electronica he worked with such jazz musicians as Rahsaan Roland Kirk and David Sanborn. On his latest release, the witty and accessible "Aural & Hearty," he gets a hand from U2's Bono, a man not exactly known for surrendering the spotlight to others. Still, Dorn was hardly disappointed with the experience, and reported that Bono is "actually really cool." So is "Aural."

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Sept. 27: The New Zealand-born, Welsh-raised musician **Peter Bruntnell** has a burning passion for American roots rock, and more than enough talent to make you forget his origins.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Sept. 28: **Peter Bruntnell** (see Maxwell's). Sept. 29: **Juliana Hatfield.** Hatfield has been a fixture on the independent-pop scene for more than a decade, creating distinctly distaff songs that range from mopey to angry, and she bolsters her tales of angst and ennui with some pretty good guitar playing.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through Oct. 14: The vocalist **Maureen McGovern** offers a program of songs by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Dining.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Sept. 28-30: The **Wallace Roney All-Star Quintet.** If only trumpeter Roney's ideas matched his formidable technique. Never give up, though, on a player who through the years has been invited to share the stage with both Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through Oct. 14, the Broadway vocalist **Christine Andreas.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Peter Mintun** is in attendance through Oct. 14.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—She may call France her home, but the American-born singer **Dee Dee Bridgewater** (through Oct. 7) is fondly remembered for her seventies stint with the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis big band and her subsequent Broadway turn in "The Wiz." Her jazz-singing career, which was revived five years ago with a delightful album of Horace Silver songs, took flight with 1997's "Dear Ella," a Grammy Award-winning tribute to Ella Fitzgerald. Lately she's been working on a Kurt Weill project, so expect a few of his tunes as well.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Oct. 1: The **Phil Woods** quintet. Woods breathes bop. An alto saxophonist who speaks fluent Parker while indulging his own alternately flashy and ripely romantic take on the music, Woods—forty years down the line—is playing better than ever. He's also held down, for some three decades, a coiled small band that is founded on Woods's now symbiotic relationship with his longtime drummer, **Bill Goodwin.** The acclaimed pianist Bill Charlap is a recent addition.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—The legendary trumpeter Fats Navarro credited **Teddy Edwards** (here with his quartet from Sept. 27 to Oct. 1) with recording the first true bop tenor-saxophone solo, on "Up in Dodo's Room," in 1949. Despite this promising beginning and subsequent high-water marks—a stint with Max Roach and Clifford Brown in the early fifties, fruitful recordings with trumpeter Howard McGhee—Edwards has remained a bit of a mystery man, primarily because he's stayed on the West Coast. His infrequent New York appearances over the past few years have revealed a stylist still in command of the bop idiom he helped develop. Dining.

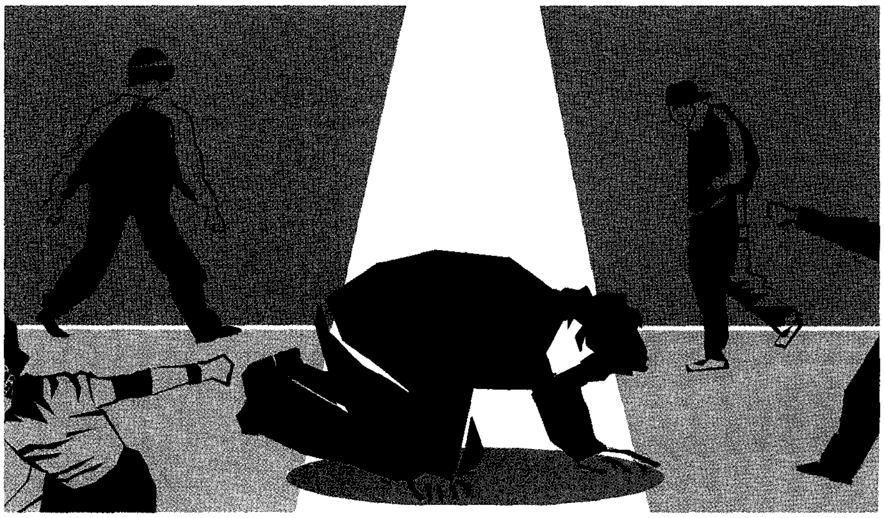
KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Sept. 29-30: The world-class drummer **Bobby Previte** consistently assembles bands that add sizzle to his smart compositions. With the able tenor saxophonist **Tony Malaby** on board, Previte's latest ensemble, Counterclockwise, is no exception.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Sept. 29-30: The **Billy Harper** quintet. The seventies had their share of Coltrane-inspired tenorists with imperious tones and volcanic energy, but something—poetry, perhaps—always set Harper apart. His recent work with Randy Weston and with his own electrifying group has proved that he's still in touch with the muse.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Oct. 1: Anyone still complaining about the supposed paucity of authentic jazz divas obviously hasn't heard **Mary Stallings.** Touched by the spirit of Carmen McRae, Stallings possesses an enchanting tone and a sure way with standards. She has the added bonus of the pianist **Eric Reed's** trio as accompanists. The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"The Divine Comtesse"** presents photographs, by Pierre-Louis Pierson, of the Countess de Castiglione (1837-1899), who acted as a special agent for Italian unification, carried on a series of notorious affairs (including one with Napoleon III), and endured many elaborate sittings, at her own request, to document her beauty, hair styles, and couture. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection"** presents masterpieces of the art form from the Tang dynasty (618-907) through the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully"** gathers the oil portraits, oil sketches, drawings, and other ephemera connected to the preparation of the full-length portrait (also on view) by Sully, the Philadelphia-born British artist. The portrait depicts the young monarch, with bare shoulders, as she pauses to smile during her ascent to the throne. Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)



"Rome and Jewels," a hip-hop opera, by Rennie Harris/PureMovement (see Dance).

KIM DEMARCO

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Projects 70 presents banners by a trio of artists (Jim Hodges, Beatrice Milhazes, and Faith Ringgold) which festoon the outside of the museum's façade. Milhazes's contribution is pure ornament, a swirl of tropical pink, green, and gold. Ringgold combines personal references and imagery by Matisse in a memorial to lost loved ones. Hodges's banner shows a pair of connect-the-dot constellations that correspond to Libra and Scorpio, the astrological signs of the artist and his partner. Each star is a cutout hole, strung with small bells. Through Oct. 31. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"Amazons of the Avant-Garde."** Rip-roaring title notwithstanding, this is a modest survey of six women painters, each of whom played a vital role in the evolution of the Russian avant-garde. The show occupies two floors of the Guggenheim's interior galleries (the central space is reserved for next month's Armani show) and the curators wisely opt for a straightforward, artist-by-artist installation rather than trying to make a case for a collective influence. Though only two of the six—the Cubo-Futurists Natalia Goncharova and Liubov Popova—have earned top billing in the annals of art history, each merits consideration, particularly Olga Rozanova, whom Malevich once deemed "the only true Suprematist." Her "Green Stripe," a verdant, humming zip in a field of white, is both an uncanny precursor to Barnett Newman and an unmitigated thrill. Through Jan. 7. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"Roni Horn: Still Water (The River Thames, for Example), 1999."** No need to choose between the picture and the thousand words in this show. Each of the fifteen photo-lithographs, mesmerizing closeups of the Thames, is dappled with minuscule numbers that correspond to footnotes (thirty to forty per print) cited below the image. Just as the imagery drifts from abstraction to representation if you gaze at it long enough, the

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

CULTURE CLUB
Cashing in on the nostalgia for all things eighties (there appear to be more shoulder pads in this fall's fashion magazines than in Giants Stadium), Boy George—a survivor of everything from drug abuse to mascara abuse—and his compatriots have reunited to bring their lilting, soulful pop back to New York. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Sept. 27 at 8.)

BARBRA STREISAND
Last New Year's Eve, La Streisand gave her "final" concert at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. Tickets ran from $500 to $2,500. She grossed almost $15 million. This year, she'll say her last goodbye all over again, with equally astronomical prices. Is she the Sugar Ray Leonard of pop music? Only time will tell. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Sept. 27-28 at 8.)

MARISA MONTE
Monte represents the best fusion of Latin passion and Western cool to appear in a long time. Her new record, "Memories, Chronicles and Declarations of Love," was exquisitely produced by former Ambitious Lover Arto Lindsay, who helped the wonderful singer—her vocals languish midway between those of Antonio Carlos Jobim and Rickie Lee Jones—with a lush background of acoustic guitar, hand cymbals, and bossa-nova grooves. (Beacon Theatre. Sept. 30 at 8.)

TINA TURNER
Earlier this year, Turner released a new CD, "Twenty-Four Seven," and promptly followed it with the disturbing announcement that the accompanying tour would be her last, although she'll continue to make CDs and put in appearances at the occasional live event. Unlike Barbra Streisand (see above), Tina may be serious about retiring, and this may be your last chance to see those storied legs in action. (Nassau Coliseum. 516-794-9300. Oct. 1 at 7:30.)

ROUNDER RECORDS THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT
The bluegrass violinist **Alison Krauss** and her band, Union Station, join the Texas-bred troubadour **Jimmie Dale Gilmore,** the Cajun dynasty **Balfa Toujours** (the daughters of the great fiddler Dewey Balfa), and others for a night celebrating three decades of American folk sounds, by way of Cambridge, Massachusetts. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Oct. 3 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Sept. 29: The **North Mississippi Allstars.** Led by Luther and Cody Dickinson, sons of the legendary producer and musician Jim Dickinson, this trio lends much-needed new life to the Americana music scene: their youthful earnestness approaches Southern roots music with a great deal of respect, but they also rock with the intensity of Cream and Jimi Hendrix. Oct. 2: **Trans Am** is from Washington, D.C., and the instrumental music it creates is as ambitious and involved as an omnibus spending bill. The trio experiments with rock instrumentation, electronic beats, found sounds (such as noise from a D.C. train station), and lots and lots of keyboard effects. Its latest album, "Red Line," benefits from a propulsive sense of rhythm.

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Sept. 28: The **Zambonis,** a Connecticut-based quartet that writes songs exclusively about ice hockey, may sound like a simple novelty act, but it scores repeatedly with a bunch of snappy little power-pop songs. Even if you wouldn't know what a slap shot was if it hit you in the face, you'll cheer for the ska-infused song "The Breakaway," the punky "Lost My Teeth," and the unexpectedly tender country love song "Great Zamboni of Devotion," which includes the immortally silly line "Oh how I wish / I could be the mustard on your knish."

CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S.
73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Sept. 29-30: **Otis Rush.** Some bluesmen are nothing more than pat phrases and pained poses, but Rush is the real deal: his sandpaper voice and knife-sharp guitar work slice through all artifice. An essential experience.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Oct. 2-3: **Ryan Adams,** the lead singer of the North Carolina country-rock outfit Whiskeytown, stops by on his own. Though he's only in his mid-twenties, Adams shows surprising depth and maturity on his solo work, and he knows how to attract the right kind of lady as well—both Emmylou Harris and Gillian Welch contributed backup vocals to his début solo album, "Heartbreaker." The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Sept. 27: Making guitar rock safe for the new millennium, **Queens of the Stone Age** leavens its power chords with the occasional steel drum. Sept. 28: **Front 242.** One of the leading practitioners of eighties-era industrial rock—its best album is 1988's "Front by Front"—this fearsome Belgian collective specializes in a monochromatic, earth-scorching machine music that helped pave the way for more gifted artists like Nine Inch Nails. ◆ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

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St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

"ROME AND JEWELS"
The choreographer Rennie Harris and his company, PureMovement, present what they call a hip-hop opera, which, Harris says, blends Shakespeare and Ebonics: the Capulets and Montagues become the Caps (who perform in hip-hop style) and the Monster Qs (who dance in a more acrobatic break-dance manner). (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Sept. 26-29 at 8, Sept. 30 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 1 at 2 and 7:30.)

DANCE AS EVER
The choreographer Leigh Witchel expands his company for this engagement: New York City Ballet's Peter Boal will perform "Six Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad,' " a solo to George Butterworth's setting of the A. E. Housman cycle. The five-member troupe presents three more premières, including "Elevator," in which the dancers struggle to perform their steps to elevator music. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Sept. 28-30 at 8 and Oct. 1 at 3.)

REGGIE WILSON/FIST & HEEL PERFORMANCE GROUP
The nine-member troupe performs "Wangena—the Birthday Concerts," created by the choreographer to celebrate his thirty-third birthday; "Rise, Sally, Rise," a trio for three women; "Vanity-starts@Home," a solo for Wilson; "Jumpin' the Broom"; and other works. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Sept. 27-30 at 8.)

"AN EVENING OF BRAHMS"
Five choreographers—Zvi Gotheiner, Ze'eva Cohen, Stefa Zawerucha, Doug Varone, and Peggy Baker—offer a selection of works (solos, duets, and trios) all set to live renditions of Brahms. The dancers for the evening include Janie Brendel, Gerald Casel, Roxane D'Orleans Juste, Suzanne Gardner, and Baker. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Sept. 28-Oct. 1 at 8:30.)

MOLISSA FENLEY
The choreographer and longtime soloist performs in "Delta," a trio with Paz Tanjuaquio and Heather Waldon. The evening will also include solos for the three dancers. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 334-7479. Sept. 29-Oct. 1 at 8.)

"SLAY THE DRAGON"
The choreographer Jody Oberfelder puts her six dancers through an acrobatic series of tests in a work about facing down fear. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 226-2407. Sept. 28-30 at 8. Through Oct. 7.)

"JAROCHO MUSIC AND DANCE OF MEXICO"
Grupo Mono Blanco, from Veracruz, offers a concert in the form of a *fandango*, a festival from the Mexican gulf city which boasts the music of *son jarocho*, with its mix of Spanish and African influences, and extended dancing, at the peak of which, according to local legends, a white monkey (*mono blanco*) makes an appearance. (Washington Square Church, 135 W. 4th St. 545-7536. Sept. 30 at 8.)

JAZZ NOTES

RA POWER
For many years, Sun Ra's recordings had mythic status among record collectors. Self-produced by the legendarily eccentric jazz bandleader and sold at gigs or via unreliable mail order, the albums were highly prized and elusive: leaving posterity a record of his achievements seemed to be the last priority for this self-professed intergalactic visitor to earth. Over the past eight years, the Conshohocken, Pennsylvania-based label Evidence Music has been steadily returning those albums (most of which were originally released on Saturn Records) to earth, and to record stores, where they can be purchased by fans who aren't ambitious enough to mount a grail quest. The latest round of Evidence releases dig deeper into the vaults than ever before, tapping Sun Ra's more experimental vein.

The ironically titled new compilation **"Greatest Hits: Easy Listening for Intergalactic Travel"** tours the various stylistic way stations, from big-band hard bop to mystical exotica, at which Ra stopped over the course of his long career. The album also includes some free jazz and germinal electronica, two styles that find fuller flower on **"When Angels Speak of Love,"** a 1963 release on which Ra and his crew—including his longtime tenor saxophonist John Gilmore—engage in anarchistic explorations enhanced by frighteningly primitive echo effects.

Two later albums, **"Pathways to Unknown Worlds/Friendly Love"** and the previously unreleased **"The Great Lost Sun Ra Albums: Cymbals and Crystal Spears,"** come from the nineteen-seventies, when Ra was briefly affiliated with Impulse! Records. Both are fascinating documents, with highly lyrical sonic explorations that favor a sort of chamber jazz; here, Ra's orchestra speaks loudest when it speaks softest. The odd album out is, in fact, the least odd of the bunch: **"Lanquidity"** was originally recorded for the Philly Jazz label in 1978 and traffics in more conventional funk and fusion dialects.

—*Steve Futterman*

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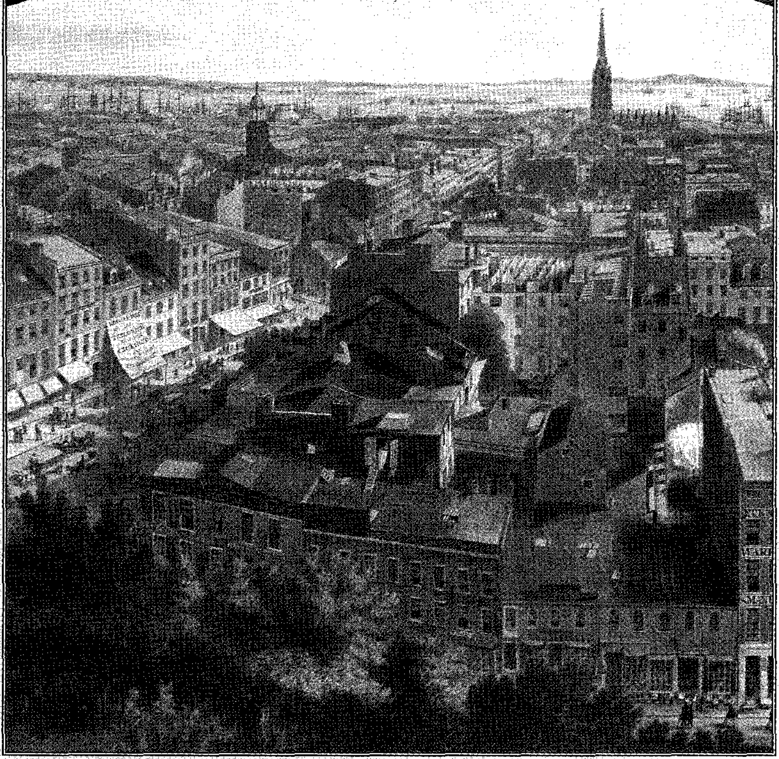
THE FINEST EXAMPLES OF THE VISUAL ARTS FROM THE CENTER OF THE NEW WORLD


Henry Papprill after John William Hill, *New York from the Steeple of Saint Paul's Church, Looking East, South, and West* (detail), ca. 1848.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W.C. Arnold, 1954.

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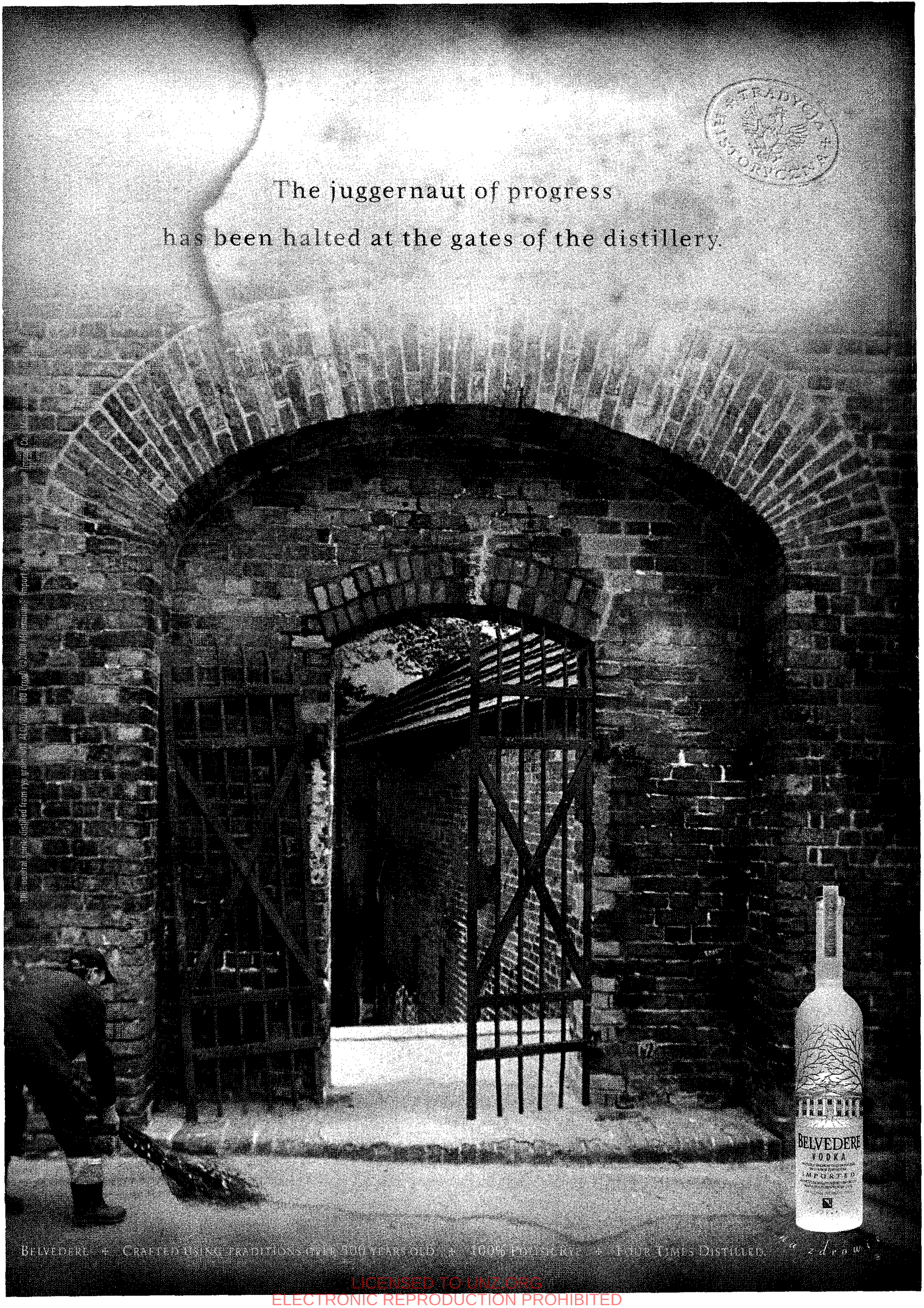TRADYCJA HISTORYCZNA
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THE JERUSALEM SYNDROME
The comic Marc Maron is fully aware of all the dubious idols that have replaced God in our culture, and he pulls no punches in pointing them out. In his one-man show, a heartbreakingly funny, faux-naïf travelogue, he leads the audience into purgatory and back, as he tries to find some kind of spiritual resonance in Hollywood fame, cigarettes, the Wiz, Coke (and coke), and Israel, where, he claims, he just wasn't "Jewy" enough to achieve the transcendence the land offers to the less materialistic. Maron may not be the Messiah, but he's definitely the guy to tell you where you won't find Him. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391. Closes Sept. 30.)

JITNEY
August Wilson's play is set in a car-service station in 1977, in a part of Pittsburgh which is being demolished faster than it's being renovated. In this atmosphere of decay, Wilson's characters struggle with themselves and with each other to find some hope, and some peace, amidst the rubble. The cast of nine wonderful actors hit perfect notes of collision and cohesion, and turn what might otherwise be a draggy experience (the play runs to nearly three hours) into a riveting and moving one. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 505-0700.)

"The Butterfly Collection," by Theresa Rebeck, at Playwrights Horizons.

KATHY OSBORN

LYPSINKA! THE BOXED SET
The star (a.k.a. John Epperson) makes her first concert appearance in seven years. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 206-1515. Closes Sept. 30.)

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER
The Roundabout's revival of Kaufman and Hart's evergreen 1939 satire of Hollywood and of New York literary society is pure gold. Nathan Lane is back onstage where he belongs, playing Sheridan Whiteside, a noxiously pompous critic and radio personality who commandeers the bewildered family and staff of a staid Ohio household—where he slipped on ice after a dinner in his honor and ended up in a wheelchair. The play itself is a model of comic construction and is chock-full of vintage stage business, which the excellent cast executes with gleeful nineteen-forties snap. Jean Smart, Byron Jennings, and Lewis J. Stadlen, as three famous personalities who pop in for a visit, are all brilliant. Jerry Zaks is the director. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300. Closes Oct. 15.)

MIDDLE FINGER
Han Ong's new play traces the interconnected lives of two Filipino-Americans who attend the same Catholic boys' school in Chicago. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 123 E. 24th St. 581-8896. Closes Oct. 1.)

THE MUSIC MAN
A delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, directed by Susan Stroman and starring Craig Bierko, who is making his Broadway début in the role of Professor Harold Hill. The show hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

RICHARD II / CORIOLANUS
Ralph Fiennes and Linus Roache lead the casts in repertory performances of Shakespeare's plays, staged by London's Almeida Theatre Company. "Richard II" runs through Oct. 1. "Coriolanus" runs through Sept. 30. (9/18/00) (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

SIGNATURE THEATRE COMPANY
This year the company presents a season of new plays by various authors, beginning with "A Lesson Before Dying," Romulus Linney's stage adaptation of the novel by Ernest J. Gaines. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

SOUL OF AN INTRUDER
A psychological thriller by Steve Braunstein, about a triangle between a woman and two of her former lovers, who come back into her life at the same time. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 279-4200. Closes Sept. 30.)

STREET OF BLOOD
From the Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes, a "prairie gothic epic" that examines bloodlust, religion, AIDS, and celebrity worship, among other topics. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes Oct. 8.)

THE SYRINGA TREE
A tour-de-force solo drama, written by and starring South African native and first-time playwright Pamela Gien, who gives an extraordinary performance in all twenty-three roles. It's a love story, really, about the strong, lasting bond between a white girl and her black nanny in South Africa. Told from the girl's point of view, the story starts when she is six, in 1965, and continues through the following twenty years of turbulent and violent upheavals over apartheid. The play, which is named for a tree common in South Africa, is emotionally powerful without being overtly political; audiences regularly emerge from the theatre crying. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

WELCOME TO OUR CITY
Thomas Wolfe's rarely produced, controversial play about race (it originally called for white actors in blackface) was written in 1923, while he was a student at Harvard. (Mint Theatre, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231. Closes Oct. 8.)

WHERE EVERYTHING IS EVERYTHING
Daisy Eagan and Paul Sparks portray a shy graphic designer and a brash financial consultant, in a romance by Stephen Spoonamore. (New York Performance Works, 128 Chambers St. 539-8892. Closes Oct. 14.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

THE COUNTESS
Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.

DIRTY BLONDE
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.

JEKYLL & HYDE
Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

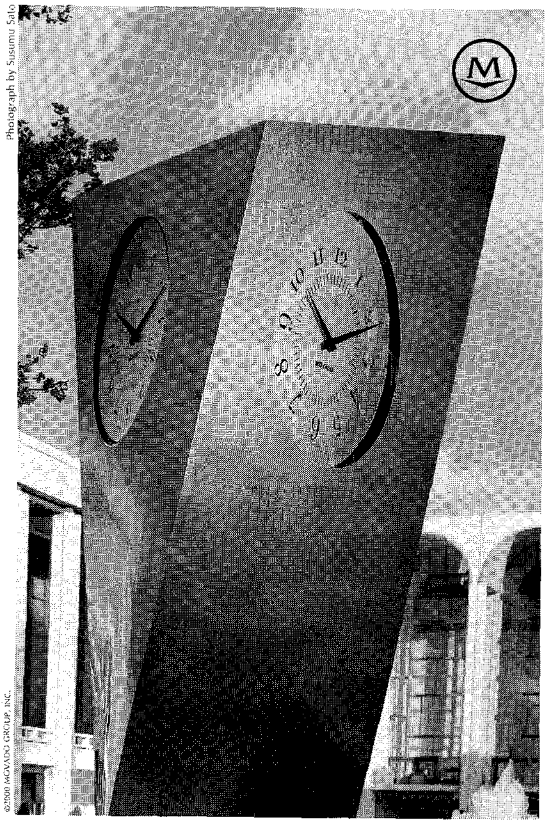
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.



Photograph by Susumu Sato

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LINCOLN CENTER: SEPT - OCT 2000

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OCT 10-15 Political Pix: *The New Yorker* goes to the movies. From provocative documentaries to classic Cold War thrillers, this program celebrates *The New Yorker's* special Politics Issue, on newsstands October 9th.

OCT 17-31 Toto: A tribute to a comic genius! A retrospective of 16 films that showcase one of the great performers of the 20th century. For a complete calendar, membership and mailing list information visit www.filmlinc.com or call 212.875.5600.

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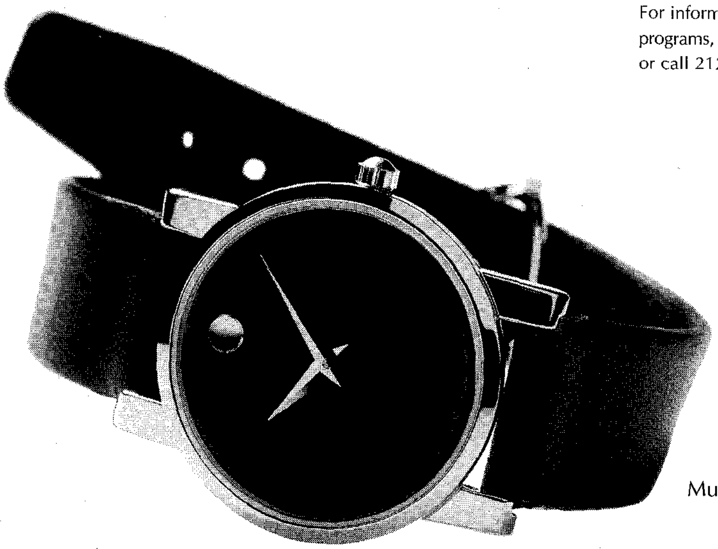

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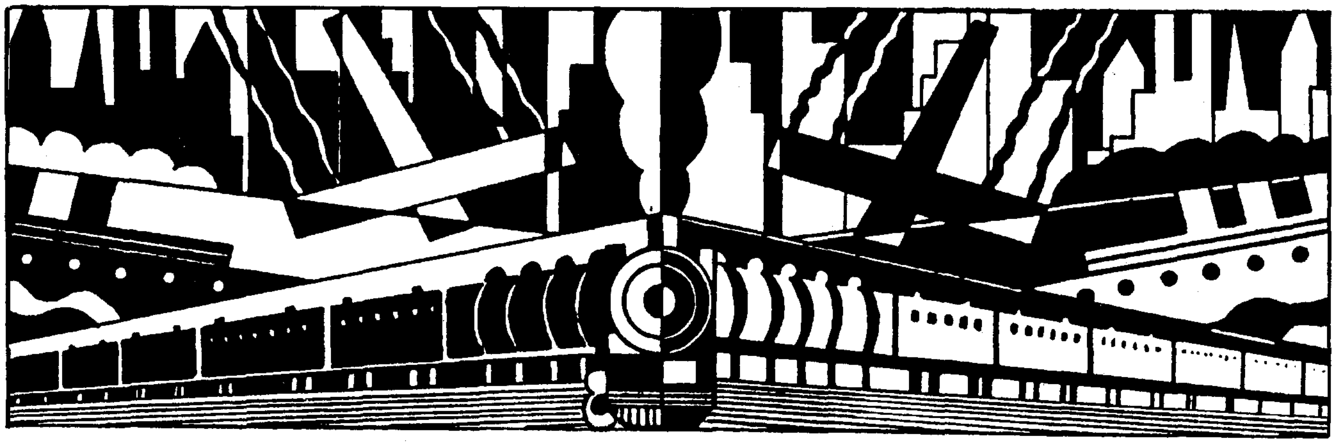

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

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Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE BEGINNING OF AUGUST
Mary Steenburgen heads the cast in an Atlantic Theatre Company staging of Tom Donaghy's latest play, in which a man enlists his stepmother to care for his infant daughter after his wife leaves him. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

BOONAH, COME DOWN
Japan's Seinenza Theatre Company presents Tsutomu Mizukami's mask adaptation of his popular 1974 book, "Boonah the Tree-Climbing Frog." Performances are in Japanese, with simultaneous English translation. Opens Sept. 29 at 7 and runs through Oct. 5. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448.)

THE BUTTERFLY COLLECTION
Playwrights Horizons opens the season with a new play by Theresa Rebeck, starring Marian Seldes and Brian Murray. In previews through Oct. 1. Opens Oct. 3 at 7 and runs through Oct. 15. (416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

CHIC BAND
An episodic comedy tracing a year in the life of an all-female rock band. Written by Jaene Leonard. Mondays at 8, through Oct. 16. (Baby Jupiter, 170 Orchard St. 946-5862.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
The latest edition of Gerard Alessandrini's ongoing musical satire of the players and the plays along the Great White Way. In previews. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

THE FULL MONTY
A musical version of the 1997 movie. With a book by Terrence McNally and music and lyrics by David Yazbek. Jack O'Brien is the director. In previews. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK
Sean O'Casey's 1924 comitragedy, in a Roundabout Theatre production. John Crowley is the director. In previews. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

LIFEGAME
A show by the British troupe Improbable Theatre, in which a different onstage guest's life story becomes the basis of the improv drama each night. Preview on Sept. 27. Opens Sept. 28 at 8. (Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

STRANGER
Kyra Sedgwick and David Strathairn lead the cast of Craig Lucas's new play, about a man with a secret. Mark Brokaw is the director. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

TALLULAH HALLELUJAH!
Tovah Feldshuh portrays the screen star Tallulah Bankhead, in a musical portrait set at a 1956 U.S.O. show. In previews. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

TEXTS FOR NOTHING
Bill Irwin directs and stars in his own adaptation of the prose works by Beckett. Previews begin Sept. 28. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 10.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AND GOD CREATED GREAT WHALES
An encore engagement of Rinde Eckert's musical-theatre work, in which a composer with a degenerative disease struggles to finish an opera based on "Moby-Dick." (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100. Closes Oct. 1.)

BERLIN TO BROADWAY WITH KURT WEILL
A revue celebrating the composer's career, starring Lorinda Lisitza, Bjørn Olsson, Michael Winther, and Veronica Mittenzwei. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 239-6200.)

BLITHE SPIRIT
Noel Coward's 1941 comedy is the Pearl Theatre Company's season opener. (80 St. Mark's Pl. 598-9802. Closes Oct. 15.)

BOXING 2000
From Richard Maxwell, a fable about two half-brothers training for the ring. (Present Company Theatorium, 196 Stanton St. 420-8877. Closes Sept. 30.)

COPENHAGEN
Michael Frayn's play speculates on the controversial 1941 reunion of the two giants of quantum mechanics—the physicists Niels Bohr (Philip Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Michael Cumpsty). It is so meticulous, so admirable, and so grave that you want to tousle its well-kempt appearance and tell it to lighten up. Nevertheless, the director, Michael Blakemore, manages to make dynamic and suggestive an evening that consists of three actors (Blair Brown plays Margrethe Bohr) and three chairs. (4/24 & 5/1/00) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE CRUMPLE ZONE
A dark comedy by Buddy Thomas, set during a Christmas gathering of five gay men. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 206-1515.)

DON JUAN IN HELL
Donal Donnelly, Celeste Holm, James A. Stephens, and Fritz Weaver give a dramatic reading of the third-act dream scene from Shaw's "Man and Superman," under the direction of Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Oct. 8.)

ELOISE AND RAY
New Georges opens the season with a drama by Stephanie Fleischmann, in which a sixteen-year-old girl is drawn into a relationship with her absent brother's best friend. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 206-1515. Closes Sept. 30.)

FOUR GUYS NAMED JOSÉ . . . AND UNA MUJER NAMED MARIA
A revue celebrating Latin song and dance, starring Phillip Anthony, Allen Hidalgo, Henry Gainza, Ricardo Puente, and Lissette Gonzalez. (Blue Angel, 323 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

GODSPELL
An updated version of the 1971 rock musical, with music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200. Closes Oct. 7.)

GORE VIDAL'S THE BEST MAN
A revival of Vidal's 1960 political drama, starring Charles Durning, Spalding Gray, Chris Noth, Elizabeth Ashley, Christine Ebersole, and Michael Learned, among others. Directed by Ethan McSweeny. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

THE IMMIGRANT
A musical version of Mark Harelik's 1985 play, about a Russian Jewish immigrant who is befriended by a Baptist couple in a small Texas town. With lyrics by Sarah Knapp and music by Steven M. Alper. Randal Myler is the director. (CAP21 Theatre, 15 W. 28th St. 279-4200. Closes Oct. 8.)

THE IN-GATHERING
An emancipated slave travels to New Orleans after the Civil War to search for his wife, in a new musical by John Henry Redwood (book) and Daryl Waters (music). Ann Duquesnay and Kimberly Jajuane are in the cast. (Duke Theatre, 229 W. 42nd St. 398-2666. Closes Oct. 1.)

IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES
A revue tracing the history of the musical form, which had its New York première at the New Victory Theatre in 1999. With Charles Bevel, Carter Calvert, Debra Laws, Gregory Porter, Cheryl Alexander, and Michael Mandell. Jim Ehinger is the musical director. (B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 243 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

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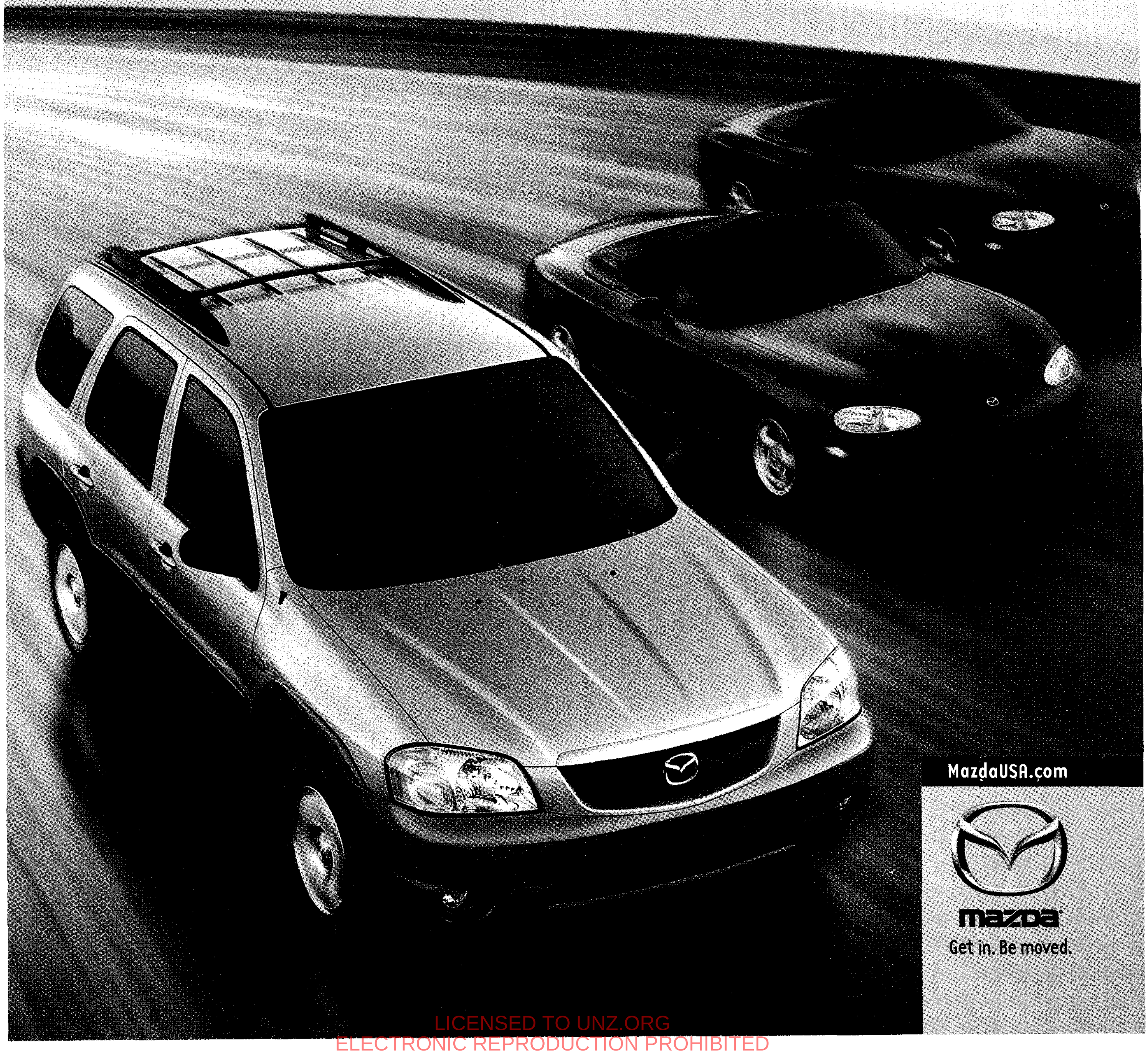

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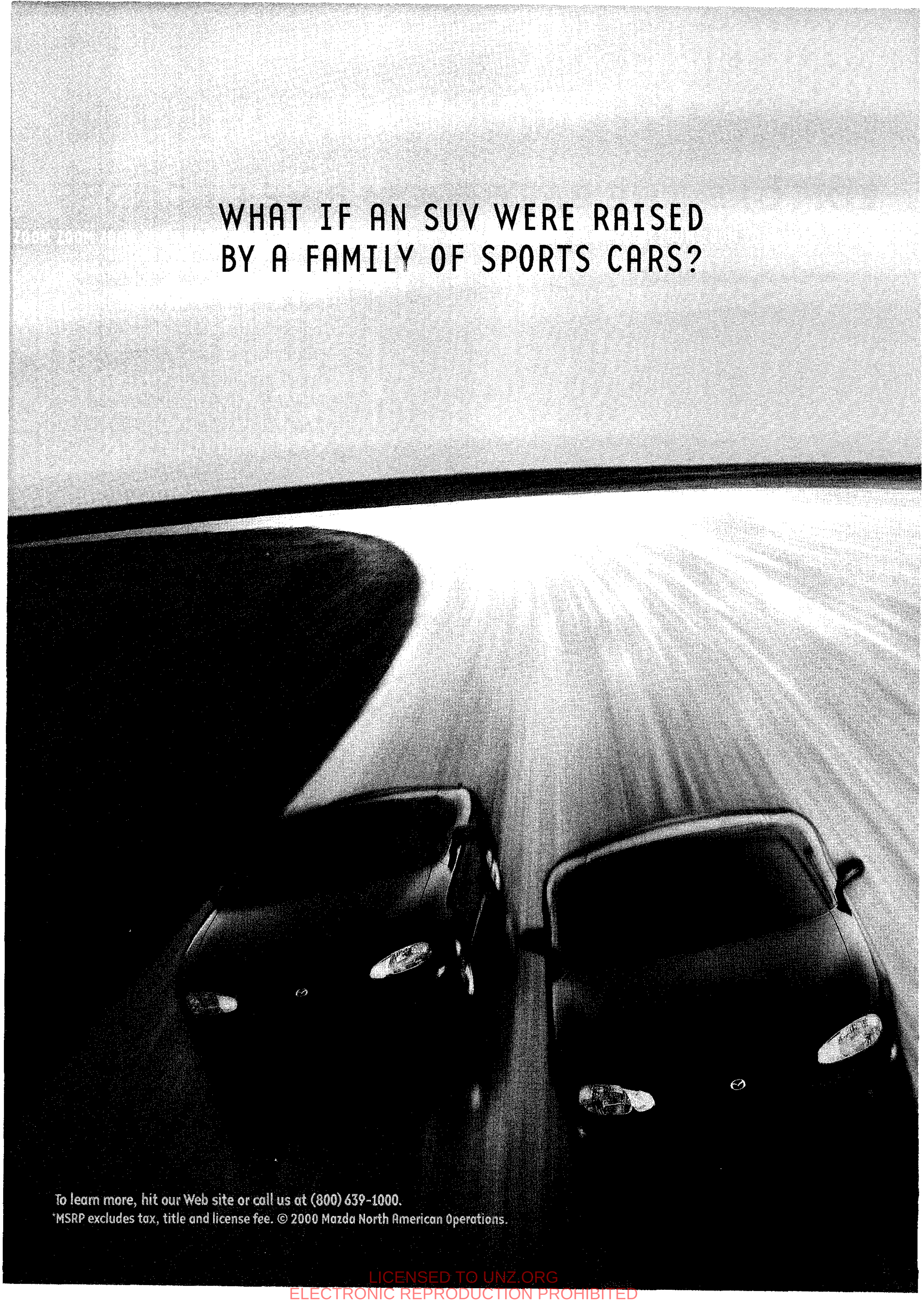
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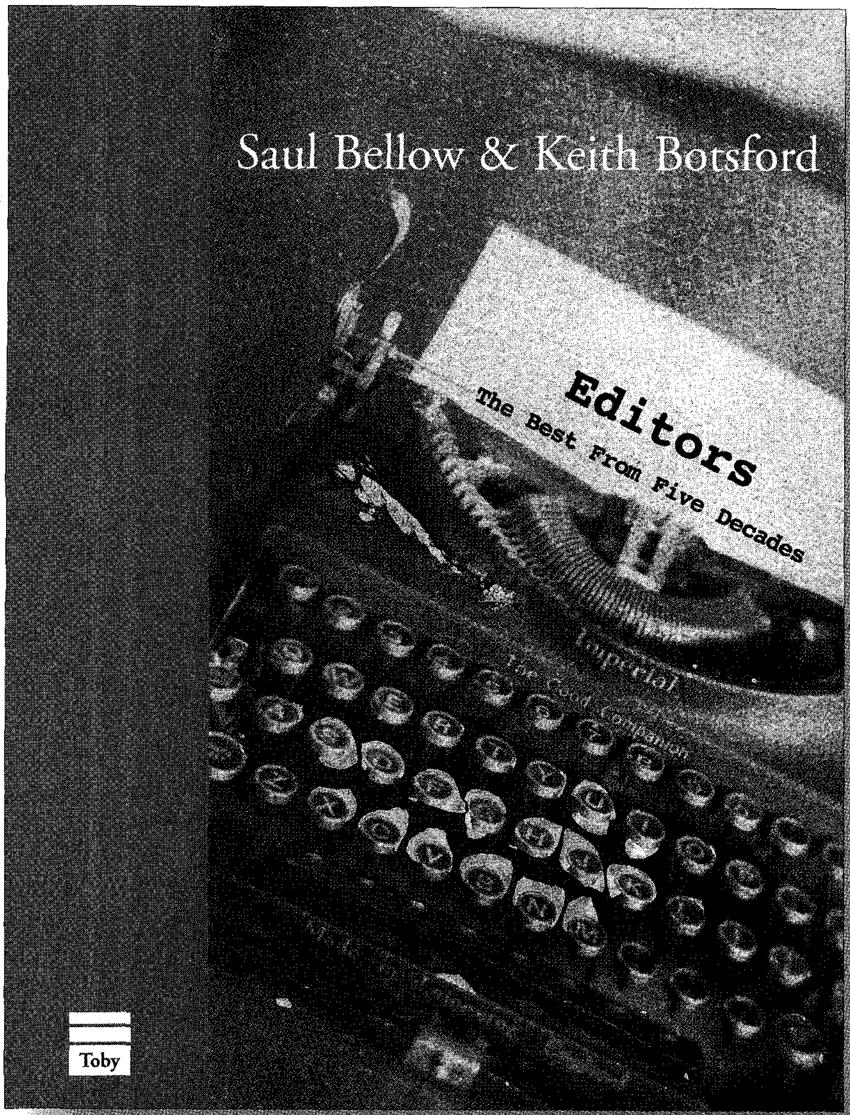
Bellow & Botsford

EDITORS: THE BEST FROM FIVE DECADES



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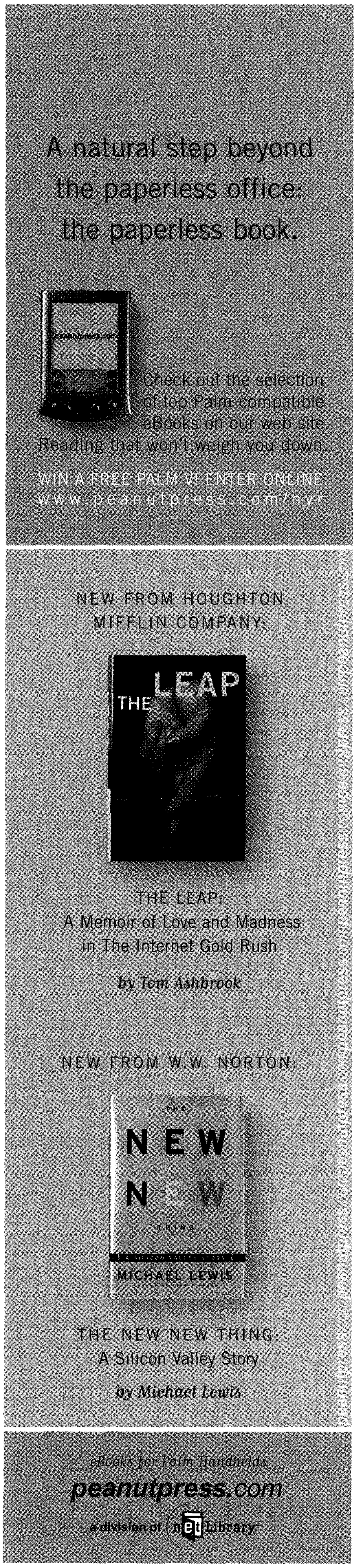

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THE MAIL

TWO CHEERS FOR NADER

Hendrik Hertzberg's piece on Ralph Nader's campaign was all too cynical (The Talk of the Town, September 18th). The point of his definition of the major political parties as a "two-coalition system" seems to be that the public should be satisfied with whatever these "sprawling, ramshackle, heterogeneous, and open" coalitions deem fit to provide, since that is the best we can reasonably hope for. Nader's premise is that we needn't aim so low. He is the only candidate willing to address our political system's core problem—the concentration of too much power in too few hands. Nader has earned a place at the debates, not as a reward for his record of public service but as a contender with the intellectual and moral strength to make a difference.

Corrina Marshall
Oakland, Calif.

Despite what Hertzberg thinks, Ralph Nader is running to win. His campaign is, in its own way, more aggressive than either Bush's or Gore's, and neither major party can match the excitement and raw energy of his grassroots supporters. Hertzberg says that Nader could have been in the debates if he'd followed the current political norms and joined the corporate coalitions of the Democrats and the Republicans. But the public wants Nader in the debates because people are tired of watching the same old game. Bush and Gore don't want him there because they are afraid to admit that this year Americans don't have much of a choice.

Damon Haley
Denver, Colo.

NO MORE PENCILS

In his debunking of the teaching myths that lead to bad writing on campus, Louis Menand claims that multiple drafts merely waste brain cells and produce clutter rather than "seamlessness" (Books, September 11th). But he neglects a significant development: the role of the computer. A draft is now something that flashes and twitches on a screen, just asking to be cut and pasted before the "ink" is even dry. As Orwellian as it may sound, we now think on screen. Dashboard navigational computers, cellular phones with E-mail readers, and other wired devices have also conspired to influence our reasoning process. So when Menand claims that fleshing out one's initial ideas on paper produces nothing but "rows of squalid and humorless squiggles," rather than the orderly realization of "an intelligent idea," he's missing the point: the mind and the page are no longer such separate entities.

David Amsden
New York City

TABLE MANNERS

The French may get the credit for inventing the restaurant as we know it, with the distinct mix of public and private space Adam Gopnik describes, but the Chinese beat them to it by several hundred years (Books, September 4th). The first such establishments in the Middle Kingdom date to the eighth century. By the thirteenth century, when Marco Polo visited, the best places rivalled the imperial kitchens and had waiters, separate tables, and menus that offered patrons a choice of more than a hundred items. But, in contrast to Gopnik's idealized, sexually subtle eating place—which "isn't a whorehouse or anything like it," even though "often you take someone there because you would like to have sex"—Polo wrote that the proportion of prostitutes in the restaurants of a Chinese city he visited was so great "that I dare not say it."

Robert Langridge
Berkeley, Calif.

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ARTIST REBORN

LEE KRASNER

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Lee Krasner 68

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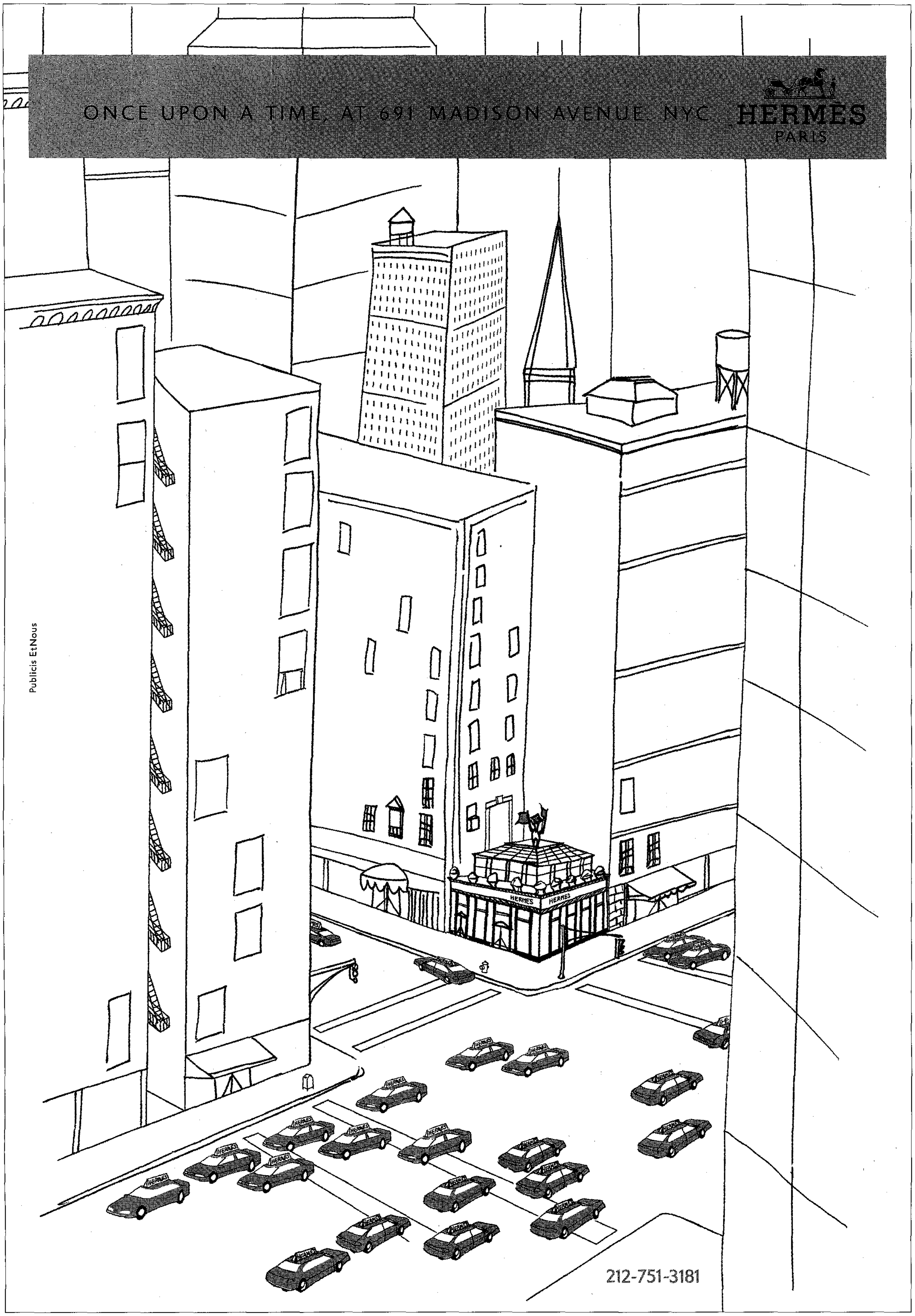
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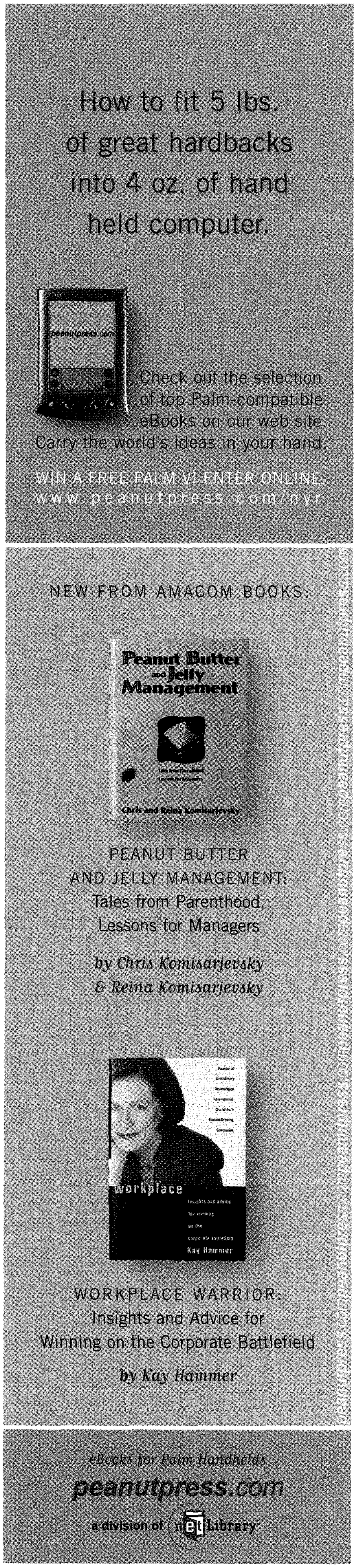

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CONTRIBUTORS

John Updike (Fiction, p. 88) will publish "Licks of Love," a collection of short stories and a novella, in November. Part I of the novella, which is a sequel to the Rabbit books, appears here this week, and Part II will appear next week.

Wayne Thiebaud (Painting, p. 89) is a painter whose work can be seen in the book "Wayne Thiebaud: A Paintings Retrospective," published this year.

Mihail Sebastian ("Friends and Fascists," p. 106), the Romanian novelist and playwright, died in Bucharest in 1945. His "Journal" will be published in November. Norman Manea (Introduction, p. 106) is a Romanian-born writer who emigrated to the United States in 1988.

Edward Sorel (Sketchbook, p. 104) has been a contributor since 1992. His books include "Unauthorized Portraits" and "The Saturday Kid," which was published this month.

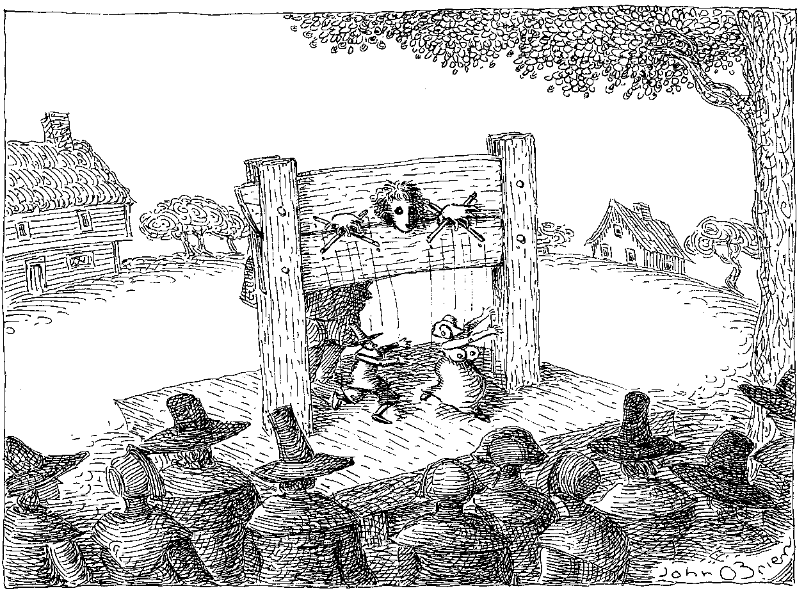
Lawrence Weschler ("The Novelist and the Nun," p. 74) teaches writing at Columbia University and at Sarah Lawrence College. His most recent book is "Boggs: A Comedy of Values."

Adam Gopnik ("Food Fight," p. 64) will publish a memoir, "Paris to the Moon," in October. This week, he begins a new column, New York Journal.

Cynthia Ozick (A Critic at Large, p. 116) is the author, most recently, of "Quarrel & Quandary," a collection of essays.

Christopher Buckley (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 72) is currently writing a satire about modern America, set in ancient Rome, with John Tierney.

Yehuda Amichai (Poem, p. 84), who died last Friday, was an Israeli poet whose work was translated into thirty-seven languages. His most recent collection, "Open Closed Open," came out in April. ♦



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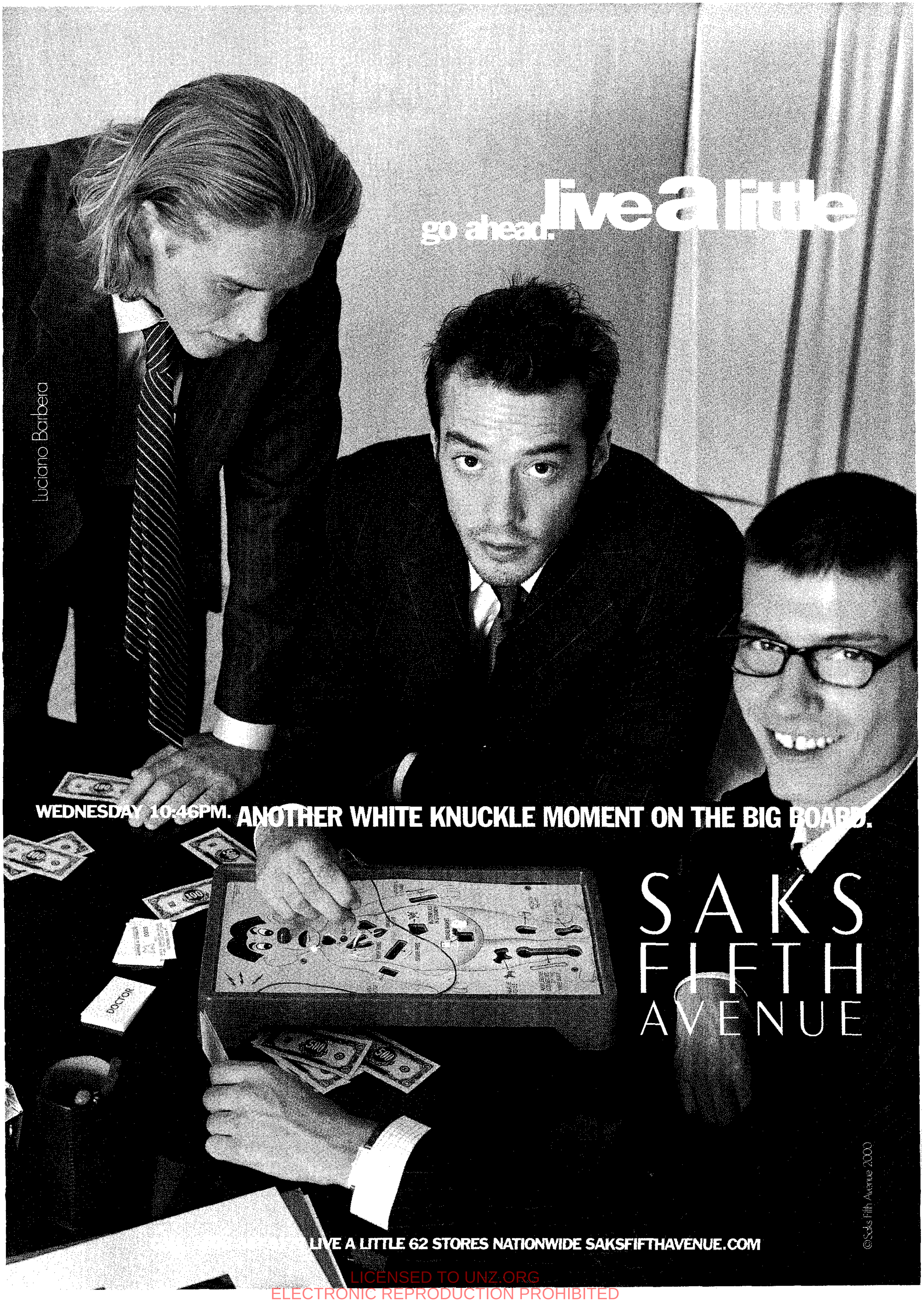
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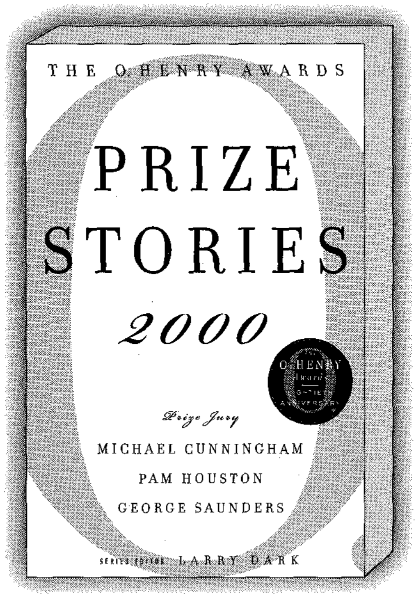
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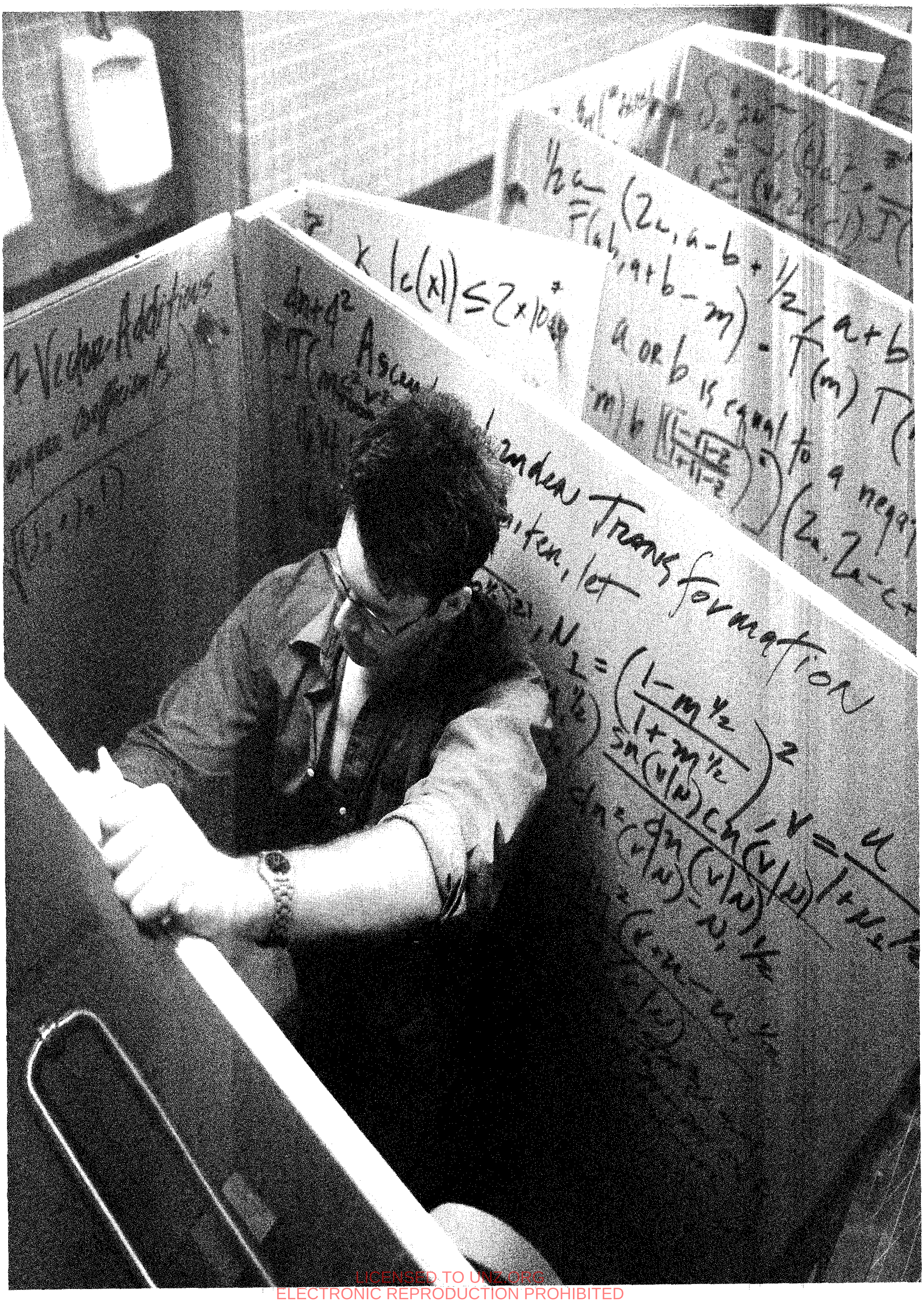
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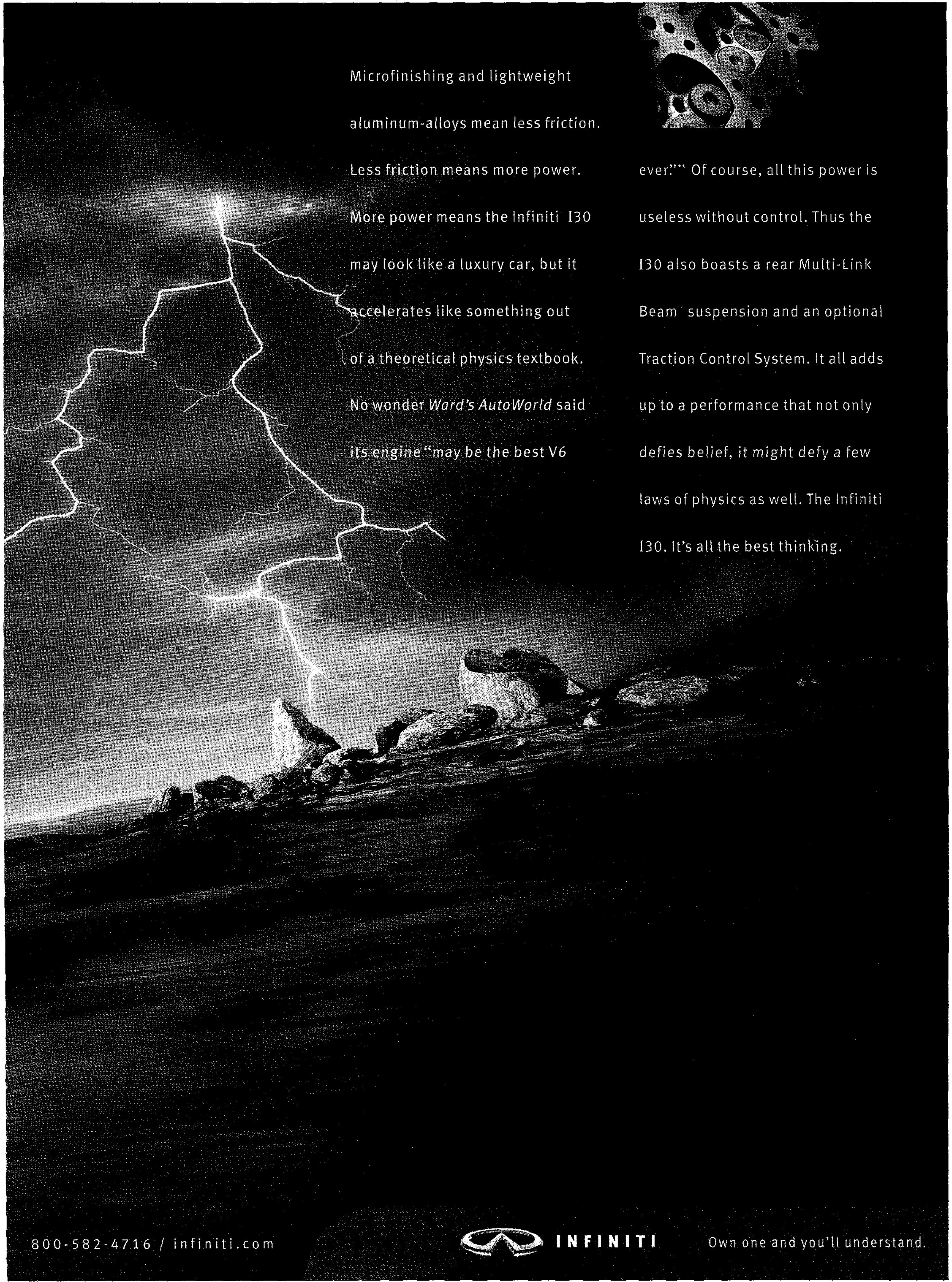Microfinishing and lightweight aluminum-alloys mean less friction. Less friction means more power. More power means the Infiniti I30 may look like a luxury car, but it accelerates like something out of a theoretical physics textbook. No wonder *Ward's AutoWorld* said its engine "may be the best V6 ever."* Of course, all this power is useless without control. Thus the I30 also boasts a rear Multi-Link Beam™ suspension and an optional Traction Control System. It all adds up to a performance that not only defies belief, *it might defy a few* laws of physics as well. The Infiniti I30. It's all the best thinking.

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